

# DANTE

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN











*Dante*











# DANTE

BY  
JOHN JAY CHAPMAN



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

1927

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*The Riverside Press*

CAMBRIDGE • MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



## PREFACE

THIS volume has resulted from an impulse to bring together thoughts and impressions that have accumulated in my mind during many years as a reader of Dante. The amateur is a little terrified by Dante's antique tongue, by his labyrinthine learning, and by the bristling walls and earthworks with which modern scholarship has surrounded him. In battling my way through the 'Divine Comedy' and its commentaries I gained what appeared to me to be a clear view of Dante as a human character; and this I here offer for what it is worth in a few essays and remarks. I have also given a rendering — rather as paraphrase than as translation — of favorite passages in the poem. These translations are in *terza rima*, with which I have been obliged upon occasion to take some small liberties.

The notes and memoranda which accompany the translations are meant to serve as a guide to readers who are not familiar with the poem. A glance at the table of contents will tell the theme of the book: Disparagement of Dante as a Character, praise of him as a Poet, and a kind of amazed wonder about him as a Force.

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN





# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	ix
I. THE GREAT POETS ('INFERNO,' IV)	1
II. PAOLO AND FRANCESCA ('INFERNO,' IV)	11
III. THE COMING OF THE ANGEL ('INFERNO,' VII, VIII, AND IX)	17
IV. ULYSSES ('INFERNO,' XXVI)	29
V. A BRIGHTER WORLD ('INFERNO,' XXXIV, 'PUR- GATORIO,' I AND II)	35
VI. SUDDEN DEATH ('PURGATORIO,' V)	47
VII. SORDELLO ('PURGATORIO,' VI)	54
VIII. VIRGIL'S FAREWELL ('PURGATORIO,' XXVII)	59
IX. THE FLIGHT UPWARD ('PARADISO,' I AND II)	63
X. THE TEACHER	70
XI. THE EGOIST	73
XII. DANTE'S OBSESSION	77
XIII. DANTE'S CHURCH STANDING	84
XIV. THE COMMENTATORS	87
XV. DEFECTS OF THE 'DIVINE COMEDY,' AND CON- CLUSION	92





## INTRODUCTION

It would be hard to imagine a sharper contrast between two men than exists between the two greatest poets of modern times — if not of the world — Shakespeare and Dante. Shakespeare is impersonal, spontaneous, insouciant, all gentleness and apparent aimlessness. Dante is tense and personal, often harsh, and always full of purpose and calculation. The two men represent respectively the two types of activity in the human mind, the unconscious and the conscious.

What relation Shakespeare's works bore to his life has never been guessed; but with Dante there is no secret in the matter. In his writings he builds up a cathedral of unified thought, in which from the foundation to the tip of the spire every arch and cornice, every corbel and ornament, is to have a meaning. The whole purpose of his writing is to record himself in unmistakable terms. The whole of his work is one single memoir.

Of all the contrasts between these two characters the most picturesque is that between the ways in which they severally regarded their own profession — that of the Poet. To Dante the antique tradition that the obscurities of poetry contained something of the divine, and that the Poet was a sort of priest or

## *Introduction*

teacher of the higher life, was the main fact about poetry. Dante believed that the Poet spoke with the voice of God; and indeed he lifted the classic conception of the Poet's function into a region of authority which the Greeks and Latins had no thought of. His own sleepless ambition to be a poet, and a great poet, is proclaimed consciously and unconsciously in all his writings till the reader almost blushes for him.

Shakespeare, on the other hand, doesn't seem to be aware of the classic tradition that a poet was a teacher — which is remarkable, considering how traditional his own classic allusions are apt to be. It would seem to be almost a personal whim with Shakespeare to belittle the Poet. He classes the Poet with the lunatic and the lover, and is apt to greet his name with a quip, as, for instance, in 'Julius Cæsar':<sup>1</sup>

*Cinna.* I am Cinna the poet.

*Fourth Citizen.* Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.

Or in 'Timon of Athens':<sup>2</sup>

*Apemantus.* Art thou a poet?

*Poet.* Yes.

*Apemantus.* Then thou liest.

In Shakespeare 'poetry' means 'feigning.' I cannot find that any character in the plays has a good word for the Poet. The very idea of the Poet, which fills

<sup>1</sup> III, III, 33.

<sup>2</sup> I, I, 226.

## *Introduction*

Dante with awe, seems to excite in Shakespeare a kind of humorous raillery.

Shakespeare is full of the sun and of the present; Dante of the planets and the starry heavens, of the past and the future. Shakespeare is Day; Dante, Night.

We love the starry heavens, for as we gaze on them they unite us to the past; and if one cannot quite love Dante, nevertheless, as one reads and re-reads him, one grows into a respect for him that is akin to awe because of his size, his sincerity, his ever fresh Promethean suffering, and a courage that is immortal. We feel tenderly towards him, and hope that we understand him a little. As for Shakespeare, we feel that he understands *us*.

The Sonnets which each of these men wrote in early manhood express the divergencies of their genius as well as anything in their later writings. That each of them was a man of prematurely early and preternaturally vivid passions may be taken for granted. We know what things poets are through our acquaintance with lesser men, as, for instance, Byron, Heine, De Musset; and we may feel sure that our two supermen have been acquainted with love and with grief in times before we meet them.

In the young Shakespeare of the Sonnets all these early tempests have already been transmuted and drawn up into the heaven of a benignant, reflective intellect. He uses the experiences as if they had hap-



## *Introduction*

pened long ago and to some one else. He is unaware that in the felicities of his language he is making a treasure-book that will for centuries survive the fashion of the day which gave it birth. The young Dante has had a similar impulse to write metaphysical verse, for the same sort of sonnet-craze was raging in Florentine society in his day as swept over London in Shakespeare's time. The young Italian, in common with many of his talented contemporaries, wrote sonnets, and his verses distanced all competitors. For in the inconceivable fluidity of his speech Dante is Shakespeare's equal.

But Dante's Sonnets are in the last degree personal and autobiographic. They give a history of his early love for his Beatrice. So little is known of this lady that Mr. Toynbee begins his notice of her by saying that she is commonly 'identified' with Beatrice Portinari, and goes on to tell us of Dr. Earle's theory that there never was such a person as Beatrice, but that Dante invented her as the groundwork for the 'Divine Comedy' which was already in his head. Dante says he saw her in his ninth year, she being a child of like age, and had a greeting from her about ten years later. Poets are quite apt to fall in love at nine, and to be very seriously in love at eighteen; and we may feel sure that with Dante the experience was not imaginary, though he may perhaps have draped it around an imaginary woman in his verse.

After writing his Sonnets Dante felt that his soul

## *Introduction*

was in them, they were precious, they must be preserved. Nay, they must be embalmed and expounded. He will write the commentary himself. Therefore he wrote the 'Vita Nuova.' In his day commentaries were in order, and a commentator was almost as great a man as the luminary whom he celebrated. I am not aware that any author before or since Dante has approached the public in the double capacity of author and annotator. Such an attitude assumes that the text to be treated is of immense importance, and when a man becomes the expositor of his own work the result is an equivocal and bastard literary form, which in Dante's case was made acceptable through the elaborate perfection of the craft with which the work was adorned.

In his 'Vita Nuova,' Dante gave a more or less imaginative account of his early love passages, and gradually built himself into the tale, till in his eyes the little book became the corner-stone of his soul's history. So serious was the self-perfecting passion of this man, so consecutive was his development, that he remembered his earliest emotions in his maturity, and wove the threads of his juvenile experiences into a steel cable. We must accept this self-hoarding element in Dante, for though it offends us at first, we later come to respect it because it is organic and devouring. He is powerless before it.

Dante's experiment with the 'Vita Nuova,' however, did not exhaust his attachment to the chronicle-

## Introduction

form. He afterward tried this form once more on a giant scale in the 'Convivio,' but abandoned the enterprise. Certain commentators think that he became conscious of a certain insincerity in the attempt. However, we may account for it; he had outgrown the vehicle.

In the meantime he had been passing through three very severe experiences about which little is known, save what can be gathered from his poetry, which is deeply marked, not to say scarred by them. (1) He had entered the furnace of Florentine politics and had been exiled. (2) He had begun that encyclopædic education which he strenuously pursued to the end of his days, and which made him the great living storehouse of mediæval thought. (3) Most important of all, he had at some period (just when is unknown) fallen into dissipations and irregularities, which, whether great or small in themselves, acted as a horrible corrosive upon his moral nature. His success in throwing off this degradation is at the bottom of the universal appeal which the 'Divine Comedy' makes to mankind. The 'Divine Comedy' is a penitential poem, and this is what gives it reality. Without this it would have been merely an interesting picture of mediæval conditions and the most remarkable of the popular *tesori*, journey-poems and dream-poems of that epoch.

By the time he was thirty-five there had formed in Dante's mind certain enduring symbols, metaphors, and observations of nature which became the very



## Introduction

stuff his thought worked in. They reflected and inter-reflected not only the stores of learning with which his marvelous mind was teeming, but many definite and acute experiences which lived and flamed within him. His training in the most difficult forms of Provençal and early Italian lyric poetry and his studies in language had given him a magical control over verse, and he had invented the *terza rima*, a form in which a continuous lyric can float and be indefinitely sustained upon the narrative below it.

Among the theories, metaphors, and fancies that are at play in Dante's imagination the most important are those which are drawn from observations on the phenomena of light. Light, being the most obvious form of that universal invisible power which surrounds and penetrates all things, never fails to suggest that power; and it is to Dante's use of those luminous phenomena, which are familiar to every one, that the acceptance of this great poem as something 'divine' is largely due. The world of his imagery had long existed within him before he began to write the 'Comedy,' and his leading ideas had taken on the shapes of symbols and had grown into a kind of mythology which for him replaced and superseded the visible world. A few of these ideas he names and labels for us quite plainly; but they are all closely related and all make their appeal to us through an inner poetic logic, which need not and ought not to be analyzed too closely.

Dante's two most specific and recurrent symbols,

## Introduction

both of them drawn from the effects of light, are the *Selva oscura* and the *Stelle*. Each of these symbols has a twofold application, first as a figure of speech in his general philosophic view of the life of man, and second as a reference to the facts of his own life. The *Selva oscura* represents the soul's darkness and the *Stelle* the soul's illumination through the power of God. The *Stelle* shine down on us from time to time during the journey through Purgatory and keep the meaning of the whole 'Divine Comedy' as a penitential poem constantly before us.

Little is known of the particular *Selva oscura* out of which Dante himself escaped, but his words in the opening canto of the 'Paradiso' make it clear that his escape was connected with a specific and tremendous religious experience which he there refers to, and (as it were) again for a moment plunges into, in the midst of his Invocation to Apollo.<sup>1</sup> His words are that God's love had 'recently recreated him.' The word *novellamente* (recently) unlocks the 'Divine Comedy,' and refers to a turning-point in Dante's life which seems to have been as definite as the conversion of Tolstoy. It was apparently this experience which led Dante to write the 'Divine Comedy.' We thus come to see that the *Selva oscura* is not merely a convenient term for the worldly life. It refers also in a narrower sense to Dante's own infidelities to the ideal of his first passion. It was the contemplation of the stars

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, I, 74.

## Introduction

that has regenerated him. Lest there should be any doubt about his meaning as to the special influence of the heavenly bodies in such a case, he has driven home the idea in a special allegory.<sup>1</sup> The sleeping poet sees at dawn a vision of the Siren, Lust. Virgil soon appears and exposes her as a monster; and upon Dante's questioning him, Virgil explains the means by which she is to be exorcised as follows: 'Let it suffice thee to spurn the earth with thy heels, and turn thine eyes to the lure which the Eternal King spinneth round with his mighty spheres.' The *stelle* are throughout the poem the symbol for regeneration. The *stelle* represent his own escape alive from his terrible experience. The chief miracle of the 'Divine Comedy' is that a man who was nearer sixty than fifty should ever have repented so deeply for the sins of his youth as Dante did. Men are apt to regard their own past errors with an indulgent eye, and the writers of confessions seem rather to enjoy their guilty reminiscences. Saint Augustine appears in his confessions as a sensible middle-aged person; but Dante is an agonizing human being.

A half-dozen sonnets have survived which the poet and his wife's relative, Forese, exchanged during Dante's unregenerate days. They somewhat resemble the scurrilous verses that Burns and his cronies wrote to each other, only that a coarse and sallow Italian humor here replaces the burly ribaldry of the Scotch-

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, xix, 1-63.



## Introduction

men. Forese had been a particular friend of Dante's, and when the two men meet in Purgatory, Forese, not recognizing Dante, says, 'Pray, brother, look that thou hide thee no longer from me.' To which Dante replies, 'If thou bring back to mind what thou hast been to me, and what I have been to thee, the memory will be grievous.' This is the very tone that a man whose sin had left some tragedy behind it might use to an old boon companion. I have seen elder men, who have been drunkards at some definite period of their past, assume for a moment this very look, when the subject of intemperance was mentioned.

Dante during this same interview introduces a pious compliment to Forese's widow — who is alluded to in one of the pot-house sonnets in a manner that northern sentiment would not tolerate; and it has been suggested that this compliment to the wife was made as a sort of tardy apology to the husband. The parting of the two old friends is subdued, natural, and touching. 'Forese let the holy flock pass by, and came on behind with me, saying, "When shall I see thee again?" "I know not," I answered him, "how long I may live; but however soon my return to this place may be, my desire will outrun it."'

In addition to the Forese sonnets there is a small group of lyrics which evidently date from Dante's darker period. They are known as the *Pietra* poems, because they play upon the word *Pietra*, which may have been the name of a stony-hearted woman who

## Introduction

rejected the poet's love. One of these lyrics belongs to the most powerful kind of agonized love-poetry, where masculine passion is mingled with hatred. Nothing is known as to the date or the story of these poems, but they undoubtedly place Dante among the great classic Lovers who have made verse express savage, cynical, defeated wrath. The *Pietra* poems seem to give us a deeper glimpse into the Inferno than could be guessed from the Forese sonnets; for they imply a long period of cynicism.

But if his fall had been great, his repentance was sincere. The profundity and honesty of Dante's reformation all but pains us, so intimate is the revelation. This aspect of the 'Divine Comedy' as a penitential poem must be remembered, because there are many other aspects of it. The poem may be considered as a plea in justification of his political course; or as a means of complimenting eminent persons who had befriended him and of unloading a miscellany of historic and poetic ideas; or indeed as the resource of a most active-minded man who found himself without an occupation.

Politics had singed him: Love had singed him: Learning had isolated him: Religion had saved him. He will marshal the first three under the ægis of his salvation. He will regiment the whole of heaven and earth under the terms of his great experience; and there shall not be a flaw or fault of logic in the whole structure.

## *Introduction*

All the subjects of which the poem treats are submerged in Dante's dominating interest in his private spiritual development. Even the Fall of Man is to him but an incident in his own soul's history. His earliest religious instinct had been aroused by his glimpse of Beatrice. To the heavenly purity of that experience he must return. What remained of life was subsidiary, a mere means to that end. A bystander once heard him declare that he would say of Beatrice things that had never before been said of a woman — an odd thing to announce publicly, but one quite in keeping with Dante's character; for he was 'terrible' in the Italian sense of the word, that is to say, outspoken in the extreme. At the close of the 'Vita Nuova' he makes the same statement. Beatrice was to him the heart of his mystery. It was *she* against whom he had sinned. The remark resembles a fine dramatic gesture. In another aspect it is a little baroque; for in saying it he seems to proffer his mistress a rose with one hand, while he points to his own bosom with the other.

Dante's frailty is the source of his power. Had he been truly a mediæval theologian, or philosopher, or moralist, or historian, he would to-day be as dead as the rest of them. The truth is that all of his formal and diagrammatic philosophy is an illusion; it is a thing of his own which he has constructed in solitude and which has never passed through the destructive conflicts of the classroom or the dinner table. It is



## *Introduction*

full of whimsies and cobwebs, private significances and key-words; and there is no philosophic instrument of thought which he does not distort as he touches it — even as all poets do, and must do.

In this matter of Dante's coherency we have a just quarrel with the commentators, who measure the foundation of his Hades as if they were uncovering the walls of Troy. Dante's categories of sins and of virtues, of purgations and awards, serve his purpose. His assignments of destinies to historic and literary personages create his atmosphere and tell his tale. But any endeavor to bring these fancies into an accurate relation to history or to theology is fantastic. They have merely the same sort of relation to history that a background of Titian has to Nature: they are symbols which create an atmosphere and serve as a foil to the poet's central ideas. To agree with Dante that he is living in a logical framework of ideas is to misjudge him.

Let us take the simplest case: There is a philosophic question which arises at every instant of our experience and has occupied the thought of man since the earliest times, the question, namely, whether we shall trust Instinct or Reason, or, in other words, whether moral truth can be finally stated. The case for Instinct may be called the poetic side of the question: the case for Reason, the dogmatic side. Now Dante is very solemnly and beautifully on both sides of the question on almost every page of his poem. He is de-

## Introduction

terminedly on the dogmatic side when he says, 'The man is mad who thinks that human reason can traverse the infinite road that unites one substance in three persons. Be content ye mortals with the *fact*.'<sup>1</sup> He is clearly on the poetic side when he describes that peculiar merit of his own poetry which distinguishes him from his contemporaries. 'I am one who, when Love inspires me, take note, and I go on setting it forth after the fashion which Love dictates within me.'<sup>2</sup> He is especially on the poetic side when he says that 'the intellect becomes immersed so deeply in the higher regions of heaven, that memory cannot retrace its track.' This, if he really meant it, would put an end to his poem. But he does not mean it; that is, he does not mean it to interfere with his claim — not to say boast — that his poem is a logical, coherent, dogmatic apperception of the whole universe. And therefore towards the close of the 'Paradiso' he even goes back on Love itself as the important thing, and exalts the Intellect above Love. 'Hence we see that the experience of beatitude is founded on the act that seeth, not on that which loveth, which follows afterwards.'<sup>3</sup> The commentator Landino expounds: 'Happiness consists in seeing, namely in cognition, not in love; because love results from cognition, not cognition from love.'

It would seem superfluous to point out the contra-

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, III, 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Paradiso*, XXVIII, 106.

## *Introduction*

dictions of poetry; but Dante's perpetual parading of his cosmos, and the piety which the commentators show toward his labels and signposts, make it almost necessary to remark that his whole scheme consists merely in legitimate stage settings, which lose all meaning if removed from the theater, for they have not three dimensions. His formal structure of philosophy is riddled with self-deception and his poetic effects are due to the artistic cunning, or poetic genius, with which that structure is used. Indeed that species of cunning is what all poetry is made up of — even in the 'Divine Comedy.'

Thus it would appear that Shakespeare and his daylight were in the right, after all.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to  
heaven;

And, as imagination bodies forth

The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination

That, if it would but apprehend some joy,  
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;

Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!





# DANTE

## I

### THE GREAT POETS

THE reason that translators are slashed, maimed, and borne bleeding from the field after a duel with Dante, is that they accept the conditions which the judges lay down — the judges being certain large-wigged antiquarians whose minds are as much encumbered with the paraphernalia of learning as was the sanctum of Don Quixote. These judges are men whose very existence and function in the world depend on keeping Dante unscathed and victorious. Therefore they give their champion every advantage they can think of.

Dante is permitted to write as obscurely as he pleases, and if one of the judges can add a sixth hypothesis as to what Dante is talking about in some well-known passage, that is a feather in the cap of the judicial inquisitor, and he casts it before the translator with a jaunty turn of his wrist. Dante is given the privilege of inventing his own language as he proceeds, freely changing his vowels, genders, and participles to eke out his rhymes, and throwing in words of his own manufacture according to inner sentiment.

## *Dante*

and personal fancy. The freedom enjoyed by writers before the invention of punctuation (which came in with printing) can, of course, never be recovered — a freedom which Dante revels in; for commas and colons are like leaden pellets hung on the wings of inspiration. The translator, however, must use his own idiom in a conventional, flat-footed way. He must punctuate in such a manner as to show which of the possible interpretations he adopts; he must avoid solecisms and, of course, must never be obscure or hieratic. Dante himself, with diabolical forethought, protected himself by the solemn announcement that every word he says has four meanings: the obvious, the moral, the theological, and the anagogical (this last being an airy disappearance into the heaven beyond); so that every line of him is professedly a mystery-play. But the translator must express or suggest all this mysticism by writing with a bit of chalk on a blackboard, while the judges look on and keep score.

The game is the best game in the world; but in common fairness the rules should be amended. The modern illustrator or copyist should be given the same sort of freedom as the Old Master. Dante should be allowed to make his recitation, and then be entirely excluded from the auditorium. The judges should be ungowned and made to sit with the populace. Their age-long labors as technical experts are completed; and no one in the future is likely to find out very much more about the geography of the whole dark

## *The Great Poets*

Dantesque forest which has been so conscientiously explored during the last century. The learned presiding geographers should therefore be thanked and relegated to private life. The legitimate future of the forest is as a pleasure-ground, a terrestrial paradise and region of Elysian Fields. The idea that any man should chart the district, enclose it and reproduce the whole thing in his own plaster-cast idiom, is atrocious; and any plans or papers that indicate such a purpose should be taken away from the visitor as he leaves this precious, historic wild-spot of the past, the sanctuary of legends, passions, superstitions, and unrecoverable beauty.

Nevertheless every man should be allowed to wander freely in the reserve and to sketch in water-colors or write original verses there. This does no harm to anybody. The wise among the lovers who stray there will say little about their own thoughts or doings, or at most will, at a later time, perhaps, lend their scribblings or their sketchings to a friend, saying — ‘All we ask is that you do not approach the copy too near to the original or bring the sketch inside the sacred enclosure.’

The translations which follow have been made quite recently, with the exception of that of the Fourth Canto of the ‘Inferno’ (the first in this volume), which was done about thirty years ago, and which I reprint with some misgivings as the work of a former

## *Dante*

day. Those virtuous spirits who lived before the time of Christ are confined in the Limbo, which is a kind of ante-chamber to the Inferno. The peculiarity of their fate was that they had no hope of salvation, yet desired it. The point is again referred to in the Ninth Canto of the 'Inferno,' where Dante addresses Virgil as one 'whose sole punishment was hope denied.'

Inasmuch as this Fourth Canto of the 'Inferno' is devoted to the Limbo and especially concerns the great poets of antiquity and Dante's relation to them, I will borrow from Hallam the following words which seem to me almost the best thing ever said about Dante:

'His appearance made an epoch in the intellectual history of modern nations, and banished the discouraging suspicions which long ages of lethargy tended to excite, that Nature had exhausted her fertility in the great poets of Greece and Rome. It was as if, at some of the ancient games, a stranger had appeared upon the plain, and thrown his quoit among the marks of former casts which tradition had ascribed to the demigods.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> My heavy sleep a sullen thunder broke,  
So that I shook myself, springing upright,  
Like one awakened by a sudden stroke,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Toynbee: *Dante in English Literature*, vol. I, p. xlvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Inferno*, iv.



## *The Great Poets*

And gazed with fixed eyes and new-rested sight  
Slowly about me — awful privilege —

To know the place that held me, if I might.  
In truth I found myself upon the edge

That girds the valley of the dreadful pit,  
Circling the infinite wailing with its ledge.

Dark, deep, and cloudy, to the depths of it  
Eye could not probe, and though I bent mine low,

It helped my vain conjecture not a whit.  
'Let us go down to the blind world below,'

Began the poet, with a face like death,  
'I shall go first, thou second.' 'Say not so,'

Cried I when I again could find my breath,  
For I had seen the whiteness of his face,

'How shall I come if thee it frighteneth?'  
And he replied: 'The anguish of the place

And those that dwell there thus hath painted me  
With pity, not with fear. But come apace;

The spur of the journey pricks us.' Thus did he  
Enter himself, and take me in with him,

Into the first great circle's mystery  
That winds the deep abyss about the brim.

Here there came borne upon the winds to us,  
Not cries, but sighs that filled the concave dim,  
And kept the eternal breezes tremulous.

The cause is grief, but grief unlinked to pain,  
That makes the unnumbered peoples suffer thus.  
I saw great crowds of children, women, men,

## *Dante*

Wheeling below. 'Thou dost not seek to know  
What spirits are these thou seest?' Thus again  
My master spoke. 'But ere we further go,  
I'd have thee know that these feel not the weight  
Of sin. They well deserved, — and yet not so. —  
They had not baptism, which is the gate  
Of Faith, — thou holdest. If they lived before  
The days of Christ, though sinless, in that state  
God they might never worthily adore.  
And I myself am such an one as these.

For this shortcoming — on no other score —  
We are lost, and most of all our torment is  
That, lost to hope, we live in strong desire.'  
Grief seized my heart to hear these words of his,  
Because most splendid souls and hearts of fire  
I recognized, hung in that Limbo there.

'Tell me, my master dear, tell me, my sire,'  
Cried I at last, with eager hope to share  
That all-convincing faith, — 'but went there not  
One, — once, — from hence, — made happy though  
it were

Through his own merit or another's lot?'  
'I was new come into this place,' said he,  
Who seemed to guess the purport of my thought,  
'When Him whose brows were bound with Victory  
I saw come conquering through this prison dark.  
He set the shade of our first parent free,  
With Abel, and the builder of the ark,  
And him that gave the laws immutable,

## *The Great Poets*

And Abraham, obedient patriarch,  
David the king, and ancient Israel,  
His father and his children at his side,  
And the wife Rachel that he loved so well,  
And gave them Paradise, — and before these men  
None tasted of salvation that have died.'

We did not pause while he was talking then,  
But held our constant course along the track,  
Where spirits thickly thronged the wooded glen.  
And we had reached a point whence to turn back  
Had not been far, when I, still touched with fear,  
Perceived a fire, that, struggling with the black,  
Made conquest of a luminous hemisphere.

The place was distant still, but I could see  
Clustered about the fire, as we drew near,  
Figures of an austere nobility.

'Thou who dost honor science and love art,  
Pray who are these, whose potent dignity  
Doth eminently set them thus apart?'

The poet answered me, 'The honored fame  
That made their lives illustrious touched the heart  
Of God to advance them.' Then a voice there came,  
'Honor the mighty poet'; and again,

'His shade returns, — do honor to his name.'  
And when the voice had finished its refrain,  
I saw four giant shadows coming on.

They seemed nor sad nor joyous in their mien.  
And my good master said: 'See him, my son,

## *Dante*

That bears a sword and walks before the rest,  
And seems the father of the three, — that one  
Is Homer, sovran poet. The satirist  
Horace comes next; third, Ovid; and the last  
Is Lucan. The lone voice that name expressed  
That each doth share with me; therefore they haste  
To greet and do me honor; — nor do they wrong.'

Thus did I see the assembled school who graced  
The master of the most exalted song,  
That like an eagle soars above the rest.  
When they had talked together, though not long,  
They turned to me, nodding as to a guest, —  
At which my master smiled. But yet more high  
They lifted me in honor. At their behest  
I went with them as of their company,  
And made the sixth among those mighty wits.

Thus towards the light we walked in colloquy  
Of things my silence wisely here omits,  
As there 'twas sweet to speak them, till we came  
To where a seven times circled castle sits,  
Whose walls are watered by a lovely stream.  
This we crossed over as it had been dry,  
Passing the seven gates that guard the same,  
And reached a meadow, green as Arcady.  
People were there with deep, slow-moving eyes  
Whose looks were weighted with authority.  
Scant was their speech, but rich in melodies.



## *The Great Poets*

We turned aside and found a pasture fair,  
A place all full of light and of great size,  
And we could see each spirit that was there.  
And straight before my eyes upon the green  
Were shown to me the souls of those that were,  
Great spirits it exalts me to have seen.  
Electra with her comrades I descried:  
I saw Æneas, and knew Hector keen,  
And in full armor Cæsar, falcon-eyed,  
Camilla and the Amazonian queen,  
King Latin with Lavinia at his side,  
Brutus that did avenge the Tarquin's sin,  
Lucrece, Cornelia, Marcia, Julia,  
And by himself the lonely Saladin.

The Master of all thinkers next I saw  
Amid the philosophic family.  
All eyes were turned on him with reverent awe;  
Plato and Socrates were next his knee,  
Then Heraclitus and Empedocles,  
Thales and Anaxagoras, and he  
That based the world on chance; and next to these,  
Zeno, Diogenes, and that good leech  
The herb-collector, Dioscorides.  
Orpheus I saw, Livy and Tully, each  
Flanked by old Seneca's deep moral lore;  
Euclid and Ptolemy, and within their reach  
Hippocrates and Avicenna's store:  
The sage that wrote the master commentary, —

## *Dante*

Averrhoës, with Galen and a score  
Of great physicians. But my pen were weary  
Depicting all of that majestic plain  
Splendid with many an antique dignitary.  
My theme doth drive me on, and words are vain  
To give the thought the thing itself conveys.  
The six of us were now cut down to twain.  
My guardian led me forth by other ways,  
Far from the quiet of that trembling wind,  
And from the gentle shining of those rays,  
To places where all light was left behind.

## II

### PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

THE book which Francesca names as the cause of her own undoing was the story of Sir Launcelot du Lake. It is perhaps superfluous to remind the reader that Launcelot was the most famous of the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table. He had been brought up by the enchanter Merlin. He failed in his quest for the Holy Grail because of his guilty love for Queen Guinevere. The legend of their loves so touched the imagination of Europe during many centuries that the name of Launcelot's friend and fellow knight Galeotto (who brought the lovers together and suggested to the Queen that she give Launcelot the kiss that overpowered him) became the nickname for a pander or procurer; and it is in this sense that Dante uses the word at the close of the canto.

<sup>1</sup> Thus from the Upper Circle down we go  
To where the Lower curves, and lesser ground  
Compresses greater pain to cries of woe.

Here, gnashing horribly, we Minos found,  
Assaying sins in the gateway. He doth test,  
Condemn, despatch, by whirling of his tail around.  
I say that every sinner stands confessed

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, iv.

## *Dante*

At sight of this great Wizard of Sin's Mind,  
Who, knowing well which torment will be best,  
And at what depth the wretch should be confined,  
Signals the doom by coils that from his tail  
Encircle him, and in recoil unwind.

'Thou comest to the Hospice of the Dead,'  
Quoth Minos, pausing in the weighty art  
Of his great function, 'Look well where you tread,  
And whom you trust! Our gates stand wide apart  
To those that enter; but beware, I say!'

Then Virgil to him, 'Must you ease your heart!  
The fates that will this journey's right-of-way  
Are there above, where Will and Power are one.  
Therefore no further parley nor delay!'

And next a sound of wailing and low moan  
Made me a listener; for we now had come  
Where many a plaint of sorrow waked my own;  
And where the air, — although the light was dumb, —  
Was bellowing like a tempest, or a sea

With giant winds at battle o'er the foam.  
The infernal drench and bluster ceaselessly  
Beats down, lifts up, and sweeps the spirits on;  
Whirls, smites, torments. In their extremity  
Before its onrush many a shriek and groan  
Goes up, with blasphemy of heavenly things.

I gathered that this torture falls upon  
The carnal kind whose soft imaginings  
Have sunk their reason in their appetite.



## *Paolo and Francesca*

As starlings, borne upon their myriad wings,

In winter-time come rustling on our sight,

So came those evil spirits on the blast:

Like cranes that pass in one long line of flight,  
Singing their mystic music to the last,

I saw those spirits in the madding gale,  
And heard their cries of anguish as they passed.

‘Master,’ I said, ‘what souls are they that sail,  
Lashed by the darkling air?’ ‘If I may guess, —

The one of whom thou long’st to hear the tale  
Was Empress o’er a thousand languages.

To save her sinking fame from infamy, —  
So broken was she by lasciviousness, —

“Let lust be law and law be lust,” said she;  
Behold Semiramis, who — so we read —

As Ninus’ widow ruled that Sovereignty  
Where Sultan unto Sultan doth succeed:

Next, Dido, — faithless to a husband’s dust;  
Yet, at the last, an amorous suicide:

The Egyptian Queen that sated Cæsar’s lust:  
Helen, whose beauty in War’s front did move

For half a century, — Love’s argument:  
Achilles whose last battle was for love:

Paris and Tristan, and —’ The while, intent  
He pointed out and named belovéd names

Of those whom love dismissed from life above, —

The antique Knights, the paladins, the dames, —

Pity o’ercame me and bewilderment.

## *Dante*

'Ah, Poet,' I began, 'twould be heart's ease  
To have some parley with yon clinging twain  
That seem to float so lightly on the breeze,'  
And he, 'Thou seest they will pass again:  
When they come nigh, let Love be all thy claim  
For speech with them, and they will not refrain.'  
As the wind willed, they soon and gently came;  
And I to them, 'O souls to sorrow born,  
Speak to us of your sorrows, — in Love's name!'  
As airy doves that in the liquid morn,  
Touched with the heart's desire that masters all,  
Dip toward their nest on level wings up-borne,  
So from the flock where Dido is in thrall  
They drifted down through the malignant air. —  
Such was the power of my impassioned call.  
'O thou benignant, breathing traveler,  
Do we, whose lives have tinged the world with blood,  
Find thee within our vaporous, murky lair?  
If Heaven's King were in a kinder mood,  
We'd pray to him and He would give thee peace:  
As thou hast mercy, we have gratitude.  
All thou shalt hear and tell us will increase  
Our wish to hear and tell thee more and more;  
For now the winds fall, and the wailings cease.'

'The land where I was born sits by the shore  
Where Po with all his riot retinue  
Descends to still them in the ocean's floor.  
Love, that in gentle natures works his will,

## *Paolo and Francesca*

Seized Paolo for the body that I wore, —

And how 'twas taken from me shocks me still.

True love, that ne'er says nay to love that's true,

Seized me so strongly for his pleasure's sake

That, — as thou seest, — its clasp is ever new.

Death took us from Love's arms: and Hell shall  
take

Our Murderer.' This story from them fell.

And when I understood the words she spake,

I bowed my head, and kept it low until

The poet questioned me, 'What thinkest thou?'

When I could speak, I said, 'Ah, who can tell

What thoughts of bliss, what rapture or what vow

Had lured them to their execrable end!'

Then once again I turned to them and said,

'Francesca, your great sufferings but now

Have caused me sweet and bitter tears to shed.

But tell me, mid the bliss of deep-drawn sighs,

How first Love nodded with his crispèd head

To loose the knot of all his mysteries?'

And she to me, 'It is the worst of woes

That in them, men look back with streaming eyes

On by-gone joy. — And this thy Master knows.

But, since thy tender summons must avail

The source of all our sorrow to disclose,

I'll do as one who weeps and tells his tale: —

To pass the time we o'er a volume bent,

Reading of Launcelot who loved so well:

## *Dante*

Alone we were, unconscious, innocent.

And oft the story, when our glances met,  
Kindled the blush that with a tear is blent;

But what o'erthrew us wholly, was not yet.  
'Twas at that lover's smile whose lips were cleft, —

By weight of true-love's kisses made divine, —  
That he who from me never shall be reft,

Utterly trembling, pressed his lips to mine.  
Our Galeotto was the Book, and he

That wrote it! On that day we read no more.'  
One spoke; the other wept so bitterly  
That pity came upon me in a swoond:

I thought my hour was come, and I gave o'er,  
And fell like a dead body to the ground.



### III

## THE COMING OF THE ANGEL

THE beauties of Dante are untranslatable, and cannot even be suggested unless they come flashing in upon us as side-lights, unexpectedly and in the course of some passage that is long enough to suggest the march and pilgrimage of the whole poem. And here there arises a new difficulty; for there is hardly a long passage in the 'Divine Comedy' which is not encumbered with scientific theory, with historic allusion or metaphysical discussion, or with some pet hostility of Dante's which is in its nature hard-fisted and unpoetic; — very interesting, but a thing which it requires years in a library to understand, and an educated sympathy to respect.

The longest passage in the whole 'Comedy' which is free from technical difficulties is the Story of the Angel sent from heaven to the Inferno to open the gates of the City of Dis for the pilgrims, Virgil and Dante. The Angel's coming is first predicted and prepared for; and then the tale is delayed by digressions — somewhat as the coming of the Ghost in 'Hamlet' is prepared for and delayed — in order to make the apparition more impressive. Dante's confidence in his guide is at one period shaken by the repulse at

## *Dante*

the gates of Dis, and he timidly asks whether any one from the Limbo has ever before gone down to the bottom of Hell. Virgil describes a previous journey of his own and says that some manifestation of the Wrath of God must be looked for which will open the gates. In this way the thunderstorm on which the Angel rides is prepared for.

We have in the following extract the itinerary of Dante as he approaches and passes into the circular city of Dis which overhangs the pit of the Inferno. It begins at line 97 of Canto VII and runs through VIII and IX.

‘Let us go down,’ said Virgil, ‘while we may,  
Toward greater griefs. The sinking stars, —  
that rose

As we set forth, — prohibit more delay.’

We crossed the circle to a bank where flows  
A boiling fount that runs unceasingly,

Sluicing a downward passage as it goes,

In waters darker than the purple dye;

And, we companioning the murky tide,  
Descend the devious path, with cautious eye,

To where the Stygian Marshes open wide  
Their arms along the grey malignant shore.

There, as I gazed intently, I espied

Figures half buried in the viscous floor,

Naked and miry, who in shameful plight

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, VII, 97, VIII and IX.

## *The Coming of the Angel*

Struck out with fist and foot, or gnashed and tore

With tooth and nail to do themselves despite.

'My son,' said my good Master, 'here you see

The Souls of such as suffer from the blight  
Of Anger; and, believe me, more there be

Beneath the waves; and where the bubbles rise  
Your eye may note their lairs with certainty.

Pegged in the slime, they utter gurgling cries,  
For speak they may not, — only strive to say, —

"Our lives were gloomy under smiling skies  
Where breezes breathed and shadows were at play.

Our hearts were ever smoky: now our gloom  
Is meted us in black and stinking clay."

Thus did we skirt along that putrid flume

'Twixt the dry margin and the loathly waste,

Turning our eyes on those that drank the scum,  
Till at a tower's foot we stood at last.

<sup>1</sup> We reached the base I say: — but long before,

At every step, we watched twin flames on high  
Which flashed that turret's signals from the shore

To one more distant still, that made reply.

I turned me to the source of all my song,

'What means this silent talking in the sky,  
Fire answering fire the jagged clouds among?'

'Above the filthy floods thou mayst perceive  
What they discourse on in their unknown tongue,'  
Said he, '— if fogs and vapors grant thee leave.'

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, viii.

## *Dante*

No arrow ever yet from bow was sent

In swifter flight the singing air to cleave  
Than a small, darting shallop loomed, and bent  
Its course toward us. The single pilot cried  
'And hast thou come, ferocious malcontent!'

'Flegiàs, thy howls are vain,' the Sage replied,  
'Nought but our footprints shall thy mud retain:  
Thou'lt find them, Flegiàs, at the ebb of tide.'  
Like one surprised and cheated of great gain  
The demon listened, then at once outpoured  
The fury that his heart could not contain.

I followed Virgil's steps and at his word  
Entered the shallop, which a little sank  
And showed its freightage as I stepped aboard.

The antique prow explored the channel dank,  
Cutting a furrow deeper than of yore,  
When a foul figure faced me from the bank:

'What man art thou,' he cried, 'that seek'st our  
shore?'

'And if I seek, I leave it,' answered I;

'But who art thou with ordure plastered o'er?'

'Thou seëst one who weeps,' he made reply.

And I to him, 'With weeping and with wail,  
Accursed spirit, keep within thy sty!

But neither cries nor mud nor tears avail  
To hide thee; for I know thee!' Then, grown bold,  
He rose with arms outstretched and clutched the  
rail.

My watchful master broke the villain's hold.



## *The Coming of the Angel*

'Back to the dogs!' he cried; then tenderly  
About me both his arms he did enfold,  
And kissed my cheek. 'Disdainful soul,' said he,  
'Blest is the womb that bare thee!—Yon proud knave  
Left not one deed to glad his memory.  
Therefore he raves, and must forever rave.  
How many kings and princes of mankind  
Shall stand like swine tomorrow in this wave,  
To everlasting infamy consigned!'  
'Master, to see him stifled in the brew  
Before we leave would much content my mind,'  
Said I; and he, 'That sight I promise you.  
It is a wish that should be gratified.'  
Then in a trice I saw that muddy crew  
Dive at the struggling wretch from every side  
(That sight with thanks and praise to God on high  
Doth in my heart, and ever shall, abide)  
Shouting 'Filippo, Lippo, passes by!—  
The passionate, the haughty Florentine,  
The silver-shod, in argent panoply!  
Argenti!' and the while with grief and tine  
He gnawed his limbs;— and more I'll not recite.

For now a sound of grieving, and a din  
Assails my hearing and deflects my sight;  
And my good master said, 'Now draw we near  
The City of Dis that throbs with gloomy light  
And hums with crowds that make the sound you  
hear.'

## Dante

‘Indeed, Sir, in the valley there below

I see the Mosques already; they appear  
Vermilion, in a kind of furnace-glow,’

Said I. And he, ‘The eternal fires that dwell  
Within them, — for the city is sunk low, —

Keep them thus ruddy with the flames of Hell.’  
And now we steered among the fosses deep

That guard the inconsolable citadel  
Whose bastions seemed of iron, and on we sweep

Round many a deathly turn and angle stark,  
By guarded mole and dreaming dungeon-keep,

To where our sturdy steersman moors his ark  
Beneath a beetling battlement and cries,

‘This is the entrance: here ye disembark!’  
More than a thousand Seraphs, that from the skies

Had poured in blackening torrents to become  
Hell’s denizens, were perched before my eyes

Above the gates. ‘What’s he whose feet presume  
In life to pace the Kingdom of the Dead?’

They cried. My Master checked their angry fume,  
Craving a secret parley. Then they said,

‘Come thou alone! But *he* shall never come  
Whom thou past our black frontiers hast led.

Alone the fool shall find his upward way,  
(Try if he can) and thou shalt sojourn here.’

Ah, gentle reader, judge of my dismay  
When those accursèd words fell on my ear.

‘O master mine, how many times,’ I cried,  
‘Thou’st plucked me from the pinnacle of fear

## *The Coming of the Angel*

And set me down safe on the other side!  
Leave me not thus despairing and undone;  
But let us both, if passage be denied,  
Retrace our footing toward the upper zone.'  
Then said that Princely One, 'Lo, we have knocked:  
We must be patient. Have no fear, my son:  
The Power that gives us passport is not mocked.  
Comfort and feed thy heart with hope; and so  
Await me till the gates shall be unlocked:  
I'll not desert thee in the world below.'

My gentle parent vanished. Once again  
The agonies of doubt 'twixt yes and no  
Had gone to buffets in my giddy brain;  
For what his project was, how could I tell?  
Some moments they their colloquy maintain,  
Then all the fiends run to the gates pell mell,  
And shut them in his face. He turned him round  
And paced with measured steps the interval:  
Crestfall'n he came, his eyes upon the ground.  
'Who can they be who think to shut us out?'  
He sighed, and added, — 'Stand not thou astound  
That I grow angered: I shall win the bout!  
Whatever plots they weave for their defense  
Will end, as ever, in their utter rout.  
There's nothing novel in this insolence.  
Did we not see a greater gate than this,  
That hingeless hangs beneath the scroll immense? —

## Dante

There, even now, athwart the precipice  
Descends a wingèd one who needs no guide  
To thrird the circling realms of dreadful Dis, —  
Before whose touch these walls will open wide.

<sup>1</sup> The pallor fear had painted on my face  
Drove the unwonted flush of wrath from his.  
He stopped and listened, for no eye could trace  
What lay behind the cloudy densities.  
'We'll surely win,' he mused. 'We must! The aid  
Is mighty that was promised. — Surely 'tis  
Most sure to come: — and yet 'tis long delayed.'  
Perhaps my inner terrors magnified  
The alarm his broken sentences betrayed;  
'Has ever one gone down by Limbo's side,  
Even to the bottom of this dismal shell, —  
One whose sole punishment was hope denied?'  
I asked; and he made answer, 'Truth to tell,  
It happens rarely, yet I once was here,  
Sent by the sorceress, Erictho fell,  
Who could compel the dead to reappear.  
And me she forced to pass this battlement  
And fetch a spirit from the deepest sphere, —  
Farthest removed from heaven's firmament, —  
Where Judas grieves. And well I know the path.  
Therefore take heart. Around the tenements  
Of Dreadful Dis the Marsh miasmas hath,  
With miles of breathing mire. One enters not

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, ix.



## *The Coming of the Angel*

Except beneath the blaze and bolt of wrath.'  
And more he told me that I have forgot:

For now my eyes were fastened on the frown  
Of the ramparts and a ruddy glowing spot  
Whence three infernal, blood-smeared shapes  
looked down,

Women in limb and gesture: at the waist  
Cinctured with greenest hydras, while a crown  
Of little hornèd snakes the hair replaced  
About the horrid temples of the three.

'Look!' 'Tis the furies of the coiling crest,  
The drudges of the Queen of Misery!'

Cried Virgil: 'On the left Megæra dread;  
Weeping Alecto on the right you see;  
Between them is Tisíphonè,' he said.

They scrive their flesh with nails; chatter and  
chide,  
Beating their palms and striking breast and head,  
With screams that drive me to my master's side.  
'Fetch forth Medusa!' peering down on us  
They shouted, 'Let the wretch be petrified!  
We will avenge the crime of Theseus.'

'Turn on your heel and cover up your face!  
For if she come, one glimpse fortuitous  
Will all your hope of homeward flight efface.'  
The Master trusted not my hands alone,  
In speaking thus, but in a quick embrace  
He turned me and blindfolded with his own.

## *Dante*

All ye who have a wise intelligence  
Ponder what subtle doctrine shall be shown  
Beneath the illusive strangeness of my sense.  
For now came rolling o'er the turgid wave  
A sound of terror, ominous, intense:  
The darkened acres trembled in their cave, —  
As when a wind invades a low-hung sky  
Of sultry vapors that resist and rave,  
The tempest strips the woods, torn branches fly  
And crashing trunks are carried on the roar;  
Fiercely the dust-cloud ploughs its way on high,  
While bird and beast and shepherd flee before.  
'Now cast your glance,' said he, and freed my  
sight,  
'Along the scummy surface of that floor  
To where its acid fumes and filth unite.'  
As frogs before their enemy the snake  
Dive suddenly in wriggling, splashing flight  
To squat upon the bottom of a lake,  
So did I see those huddling, ruined slaves  
When terror seized them, dive, and in their wake  
One coming dry-shod o'er the Stygian waves.  
The heavy vapors from his face he fanned, —  
The sole alleviation that he craves, —  
Lifting from time to time a quiet hand.  
I knew him for the herald of the sky,  
And turned, — but Virgil motioned me to stand  
In silent reverence as he passed us by.  
Onward he stepped, and with how much disdain!

## *The Coming of the Angel*

The gates before his wand turned easily,  
For there was no resistance. Standing then  
Beneath the horrid porch, the Seraph spoke.  
'Outcasts of Heaven, — disciplined in vain, —  
Whose insolence grows greater at each stroke  
Of Destiny and the Eternal Will

That many a time and oft your pride hath broke,  
Adding new anguish! — But ye crave it still:

Witness your Cerberus of the mangled mane  
And sorry jaw, and ye must take your fill.'

Then turned him to his muddy path again  
Without a word to us, — like one in thrall

To distant truth, or duties that enchain,  
Who seeing near things, sees them not at all.

Then we moved forward, feeling well assured  
By all the Angel said, and passed the wall,

Where not a vestige of their wrath endured.  
And I was wondering what the land might be

That was by such a fortress circummured,  
When lo, champaign, as far as eye could see,  
All filled with grief and torment opened wide!

As where the Rhone at Arles glides languidly,  
Or as at Pola where Quarnaro's tide  
Doth lave and limit Italy's domain,

The serried tombstones clothe the country-side,  
So here they stretch away in lane on lane;

Yet with a bitter difference, for these  
Were blazing with such fires as might sustain

## *Dante*

A forge to heat the craftsman's mysteries.  
The covers of the tombs were all off-cast

And from within came cries and agonies  
As if each victim's outburst were his last.

'Master,' said I, 'and who are these that vent  
From out the tombs their shattering sorrow-blast?'

'Arch-heretics and their followers are pent, —  
And many more of them than you'll believe

Are hid below, in every monument:  
Some, more, — some, less of heat from Hell receive.'

He spoke; then turning toward the turrets tall  
We picked such passage as the place might give  
Between the torture and the city wall.



## IV

### ULYSSES

THE Greek legends fell like poppy-seed upon the literature of Europe, and nothing will ever banish the charm of them from the western imagination. The conceptions of Greek mythology spring out of a Supermind which harmonizes the fantasies of childhood with the thought of mature age. They are embedded in the ganglia of the brain as music is: no explanation touches them. They defy analysis, and Dante himself fails when he interprets them: his metaphysic will not stick to them. It is only when the poet in him triumphs that his classic figures live.

The happiest touches in the 'Divine Comedy' are descriptive — whether of natural scenery, of sky and air, dawn, dusk or moonlight; or else of monsters and myths — Centaurs, the Minotaur, and other creatures whose very names have a beauty that lifts them out of their sallow mediæval setting and the din of dogmas. The classic monsters are so far removed from mankind that they do not excite Dante's contempt for his species. Charon is in human form and therefore an unpleasant personality. But Minos, Pluto, Cerberus, and Geryon are sheer monsters, and have something of the domesticity of heraldic animals.

## Dante

There are scenes in the 'Divine Comedy' where the nakedness of the original Greek shines through a thousand years of Latinized disguises. Dante casts on the figures a sort of marble effulgence that no modern writer has approached. His Centaurs are a creation of this kind. They pass by and we have seen the body-guard of Olympus. But in order to see the Centaurs with this sense of their reality, we must be pedestrians and be on the move. We must have come upon them unexpectedly, after sliding down over the crumbling boulder and passing the Minotaur<sup>1</sup>—who wakes and dances blindly, with little steps, for his fit of rage is on him. The Minotaur is as great as a creature out of Æschylus—for all that he is described in such few and homely words. The unseizable rapidity of Dante's poetic strokes has obliged me to pass by many of his most telling pictures, the Minotaur among them.

The following account of the death of Ulysses is the most famous of Dante's classical allusions.

<sup>2</sup> In the long summer twilight, at his ease,  
The tired peasant watches from a hill;  
And gazing o'er the glimmering valley, sees  
Perchance the very plot that he doth till,  
Where now ten thousand little lights begin  
In silent dance the distant void to fill:  
And, even so, the chasm we were in

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, xii, 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Inferno*, xxvi, 25.

## *Ulysses*

Was lighted up with flames like fireflies  
And little vaporous cloudlets, — near akin  
To that which floated up before the eyes  
Of him who caught the mantle as he viewed  
The steeds that bore Elijah to the skies.  
And every globing flame within its hood  
Enclosed a sinner and concealed a thief.  
And there upon the craggy ledge I stood, —  
Where any breath might shake me from the reef, —  
Clutching the rock to make my footing sure.  
My master's voice brought to my nerves relief,  
Saying, 'Within are spirits which endure  
The flame that binds and burns them.' 'Sir,' I said,  
'I thought it; thou dost make the thought secure.  
But who is lodged within yon forkèd head  
Which might be flaming from some funeral pyre,  
As when the Twins of Thebes were burièd?'  
He answered, 'The two martyrs of that fire  
Are Diomed and Ulysses, whose twinned fate  
Enacts the vengeance for their linkèd ire,  
Seen in the Trojan Horse that oped the gate  
Whence issued, — Rome and all her noblemen.'  
'If they can talk while in their tortured state,'  
Said I, 'O I will ask and ask again, —  
And not take No to half a thousand prayers, —  
Let us await the coming of the twain:  
Some flame within me bows and draws toward  
theirs.'  
'A prayer that doth thee honor, every way,'

## *Dante*

Said Virgil, 'and my heart thy passion shares.  
But list: 'tis best I speak to them, for they  
Are Greeks, and may disdain thy utterance.'  
Then, as the flames drew near, I heard him say,  
'Ye twain that shine in single sufferance,  
If in my life I e'er deserved applause, —  
Little or much, — from you, or did enhance  
Your fame in lofty song, I bid you pause!  
Let one of you his latest feat relate,  
And of his death the action and the cause.'

As when the wind a flame doth sufflicate,  
The larger of the antique hornèd fires  
Began to shake and murmur and vibrate,  
Hither and thither bowed by its desires,  
Until at last, as if it were a tongue  
At labor when a heaving thought suspires, —  
'When I from Circe parted,' out it flung,  
'Who had beguiled me with her sorcery,  
Near that Gaëta which thy Muse hath sung,  
Neither my son's embrace, nor piety  
For my old father, nor the love more kind  
That should have solaced my Penelope,  
Could quench the deathless ardor of my mind  
To plumb the wisdoms of the world, and view  
The vices and the valor of mankind.  
On the high open seas my bark I threw,  
Alone, yet fellowed by the little band  
Who ne'er deserted me, but were my crew.



## *Ulysses*

We skirted past the shores on either hand,  
Sardinia and Morocco far or nigh,

And many another sea-washed isle and strand.  
Time-worn and tardy were my braves and I

Ere we approached that narrow watery gate  
Where Hercules his pillars raised on high

To mark the boundaries of man's estate.  
Behind us lay Sevilla on the right,

And Ceuta on the left within the strait.  
"Brothers," I said, "through perils infinite

And toils enduring ye have reached the West.  
Ye'll not refuse to feed your fading sight, —

If glint of life be left within your breast, —  
On the unpeopled World behind the Sun.

Think of your ancestry! — And were't not best  
To strike for honor earned and wisdom won,

Rather than drowse along in length of days  
Like brutes whose life is nothing when 'tis done?"

With these few words I set them so ablaze  
That I thereafter scarce could hold them back:

With wingèd oars we flashed through ocean's haze,  
And rounded landward on the southern track.

Night fell and gave us all the stars that shine  
In southern skies, while *ours* were bent so low

They scarcely could be seen above the brine.  
Five times the moon with light did overflow:

We watched her kindle and we watched her pine;  
And then a distant mountain rose in air.

All joy were we; but when a whirlwind broke

## *Dante*

From off the land our joy became despair.

Three times our ship went round beneath the  
stroke;

And on the fourth her poop above the wave

Was seen; her prow was down, and deeper still

She plunges, heaven's judgments to fulfil,

While over us the closing waters rave.'

## V

### A BRIGHTER WORLD

IN opening Dante's 'Purgatory' the reader, who has just laid aside the 'Inferno,' is grateful for the change of pace and for the quietude with which the new scenes are described. He accepts with good will the deliberate and somewhat iterative chat, or chant, between Virgil and Cato (the guardian of the Purgatorio), and the rather colorless talk about Cato's wife Marcia (whom Cato gave to Hortensius, the lawyer, and who returned to him after the death of Hortensius). This lady, it appears, was a neighbor of Virgil's in the Limbo, a fact that Virgil makes use of to wheedle the old gentleman into allowing the two pilgrims to pass on. This same Cato had committed suicide rather than submit to Cæsar, a proceeding which struck Horace (who had himself run away under similar circumstances) much as it strikes modern sensibilities, namely, as something interesting yet horrifying. To Dante such a suicide represented the apex of heroism.

The piety and close attention of a person who is reading the Italian text cannot be expected from the languid eye of one who skims a translation in search of amusement. If you distract the latter by a note at

## Dante

the bottom of the page to tell him that the wretched daughters of Pierus, King of Macedonia, challenged the Muses at a *singfest* and were turned into black-birds by Calliope, and that Dante had read about them in Ovid, you put the reader off the lilt of your song and give him information that doesn't interest him in the least. If you say nothing about such matters, you leave blind spots in your picture and limit your appeal to readers who know the original — the very class you despair of, for the Dante scholar is your natural enemy. This man takes up your verse with the original still ringing in his ears, and listens for echoes. He stands on guard like a sentinel, and cries halt to a false note, though it come from the Sirens. He is not only jealous for Dante's sake, but he is protecting a pet possession of his own; for suppose you could really put Dante into English, where would this man be? The best way to get the fellow out of your consciousness is to do what will make him retreat into his own preciousness and drop your book — that is to say, deal somewhat freely with the text.

It is, for instance, necessary to abbreviate Dante's astronomy, and sometimes one must get round a difficult corner with a bold paraphrase. The excuse for such a free rendering of the poet is this, that when one dares it, new side-lights of meaning and fresh little dramatic vistas appear in the background of Dante's scenes and episodes — sights that remain hidden to the reverent eye, but reveal themselves to



## *A Brighter World*

the impudent. The vitality of a translation depends somewhat on the consciousness of these shadowy underplots, and without them even an accurate rendering will be apt not to convey the idea.

As for Dante's allegorical meanings, although the poet himself regarded them as of the utmost importance and indeed as the main point of the whole poem, they may safely be left to the commentators. The 'Divine Comedy' is made up of interlocking conceptions which resemble the springs, levers, and escapements of a very complicated solar and lunar clock that was made by an astronomer-mechanician as his life-work in the Middle Ages. It has been the life-work of ten thousand experts to understand the members and the functions of this astronomical apparatus. To take them apart and place them in the drawers of a cabinet has been the professional and daily toil of many very clever men for centuries. And of course the men are obliged to stop the machine in doing so. But at night, when the collaborators are asleep, the machine resumes its ticking; — singing birds fly out of it. If the heart of his mystery had lain in his clockwork, Dante never would have survived the analysis. The experts would have destroyed him.

I have prefaced the 'Purgatorio' with the last twelve lines of the 'Inferno,' and have followed it immediately with 'Purgatorio,' II, the two Cantos being parts, as it were, of the same Movement.

## *Dante*

<sup>1</sup> There is a place as far above Hell's ground  
As Satan's tomb from its enclosing wall,  
Where sight exists no more, but only sound, —  
The sound of water from a rocky edge  
That wears its downward way from ledge to ledge  
In slow descent, — a dreamy waterfall.  
And through this secret stair my Lord and I  
Were climbing in the little river's course,  
He first, I next. Our thoughts were in the sky,  
While up and on we toiled with unabated force;  
Till I beheld, as through an open door,  
The heavenly wonders of Eternity,  
And, stepping forth, we saw the stars once more.

<sup>2</sup> Now for a course upon a happier Sea,  
Leaving those cruel waters far behind,  
My bark shakes out her sail of poesy;  
And I shall sing the region where Man's mind  
Purges itself for passage to the skies,  
And sins dissolve from eyes with weeping blind.  
O may dead Poetry herself arise!  
Ye Muses, give me back my earlier years.  
While your Calliopè her voice supplies,  
Sustaining my weak, quavering note with hers  
That taught the impious Magpies how to fly.

The tender hue the Persian sapphire wears  
Was gathering in the Zenith's purity,

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, 127.

<sup>2</sup> *Purgatorio*, 1.

## *A Brighter World*

And poured into my eyes a new delight,

As, leaving that dead air I saw the sky:

It gave me back my spirit and my sight.

Venus was hung above the laughing East,  
Veiling a constellation with her light

That soothes at dawn the wakeful lover's breast,  
When, turning toward the Southern Pole, my gaze

Fell on four stars whose light had never blest  
The human eye, since Adam saw their rays.

O vacant, empty, widowed northern sky!

Those heavens seemed to glory in the blaze

Which *thou* shalt lack through all eternity.

I cast my eyes to northward and, behold,

The Bear was gone! And, turning round, I see  
A single figure like a saint of old,

Whose gentle aspect on our coming shone  
And wrought in us such deference untold

As scarce a father merits from a son.

Long was his beard and dashed with streaks of  
snow;

As the hair also, glistening and fine-spun,  
That fell in double lists upon his chest below.

The rays of the four brilliant stars behind  
Were fringing his pale visage with a glow,

As if the sun himself against him shined.

'And who are ye,' he questioned, 'that have fled

The eternal jail and crossed the river blind?'—  
With stately motion of his reverent head.—

## *Dante*

‘Who was your guide? What lamp illumed your  
trail

In issuing from the darkness of the dead

That broods forever o’er the lower vale?

Are the laws broken yonder in the abyss,

Or do new counsels in the sky prevail

That ye, the damned, invade my boundaries?’

My Master seized me, and with words and signs  
And hands abased my brow and bent my knees

In reverence: then answered, ‘The designs  
That bring me are not mine. From heaven came down

A lady who through constant prayer inclines  
My fate to succor this man as he journeys on.

But since thou hast a wish for ampler news,  
According to thy will it shall be done;

For nought that thou canst ask may I refuse.  
This man has not yet drawn his latest breath,

Though nigh it was, and little was to choose,  
When folly fetched him to the brink of death:

And I was sent to save him, as I say,  
And lead him o’er the road he traveleth

With me for guide; — there was no other way.  
Under my eye the wicked he hath seen,

And now those other spirits he must survey  
Who purge their sins beneath thy discipline.

Our tale of pilgrimage I’ll not repeat:  
From heaven above there falls a force divine

That drew us on and finds us at thy feet.  
Ah, give him gracious welcome, honored Sir!



## *A Brighter World*

He seeks for Freedom. Liberty is sweet:  
They know it well who give their lives for Her, —  
As thou, at Utica, in earth's despite  
Didst drop the mortal dress without a tear  
Which at the Judgment Day shall shine so bright.  
Unbroken are the edicts of the sky;  
This man still lives, and I, from Minos free,  
Dwell in that Circle where the longing eyes  
Of thy chaste Marcia yet appeal to thee  
To hold her as thine own. Oh, sainted heart,  
In her love's name we claim thy sympathy!  
Then, upward through thy realm let us depart.  
I'll bear our thanks to her, — if thou dost deign  
To be remembered in that void inert.'

'So much of heaven in her eyes did reign,'  
He said, 'that while on earth I did her will;  
But here, beneath the laws of this domain,  
Those eyes have lost their power for good or ill.  
If, as thou say'st, a lady there on high  
Guides you and guards you, ye may pass my sill.  
It is enough: nor needs there flattery.  
Go then, and look thou gird this fellow here  
With a smooth rush drawn from the marsh near by:  
And wash his face from every soilure clear;  
For 'twere not meet with film-beclouded eye  
To go before the Sky's Prime Minister.  
Around the isle, amid the oozy flow,  
The shelving ledges circle towards the sea.

## *Dante*

Where the waves beat their stem the rushes grow;  
No other plant hath pliability  
To take the surge and bend before the blow.'  
He spoke and vanished. Then I silently  
Drew toward my Leader's side and kept my eyes  
Fastened upon him only, till he said,  
'Follow my footsteps closely where the plain  
Slants downward toward its wide extremities.'

The dawn her winning battle did maintain  
Against the routed mists, that fled before  
The matin trembling of the distant seas:  
We trudged along the solitary shore  
Like men who, after wandering far afield,  
Recover a lost track, and stray no more;  
And came to where the hoarfrost would not yield,  
But sparred against the Sun and blindly wept,  
Half vanquished, 'neath the shade that was its shield.  
The Master stretched his open palms and swept  
The greensward tenderly beside our path;  
Whereat I guessed the art of that adept,  
And turned my tearstained cheeks to meet the bath,  
While he, my native color to restore,  
Laved from my face the Inferno's aftermath.  
And soon we stood upon a lonely shore  
Whose seas no ship had furrowed in all time  
Captained by men whom hope of home upbore.  
And here he stooped and from the reedy slime  
He drew and cinctured me with a green ring.

## *A Brighter World*

O marvell! — As he plucked the humble thing  
Another sprouted where it grew before.

<sup>1</sup> Like travelers, whose journey fills their mind,  
We paced the strand at sunrise by the sea;  
Our hearts pressed on, our bodies lagged behind.

And lo, as when in rosy mystery,  
At dawn Mars glimmers in the vaporous floor  
Of ocean's westering immensity,

Even so, I saw (and trust to see once more)  
A glow that came so nimbly through the haze  
That nought e'er ran so fast on land or shore.

For when I turned a moment from the rays  
To ask my Duke a question, and looked back,

'Twas larger, brighter, nearer on my gaze.  
One brightness shone aloft, above its track;  
Then, by degrees, another from below.

And yet my Master neither moved nor spake  
Till wings were seen within the upper glow;  
And then he cried, 'Down, down upon your knees:  
Behold the Angel! Bend your forehead low:  
Such Servitors stand ever by the Throne.

Without an oar or sail, across the seas  
He wends his wingèd way from zone to zone.

His pinions beat the eternal air with ease;  
Nor moults a feather from the harness bright  
That glittering and sky-pointing bears him on.'  
Then, as the Bird of Heaven bent in flight

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, II.

## Dante

To usward, such a splendor on us fell  
That human eye could not abide the light.

He beached his little, daring coracle,  
That drank no drop of the sustaining brine.  
Alone he stood (Oh blessed miracle!) —

Above the freighting souls he guided in,  
Like a celestial pilot, in the stern.

‘*When Israel fled from Egypt,*’<sup>1</sup> they begin  
In unison, and chant each verse in turn:

Above them, next, he signs the Cross, and they  
Fling themselves on the strand; and instantly

He speeded like a shaft across the spray.  
The crowd upon the beach seemed lost and lone,  
Not knowing where they were, — wandering and  
shy, —

Like people face to face with the unknown.

By this time the sun’s javelins filled the sky:  
The strangers looked about and lifted brow;

Then, moving towards us, questioned anxiously,  
‘Tell us the mountain pathway, if ye know.’

And Virgil said, ‘Ye think that we are wise,  
And know the neighborhood; but ’tis not so.

Pilgrims we are, and walk in pilgrim guise.’  
The spirits, who had seen that I drew breath,

While terror supervened on their surprise  
Marveled the more, and turned as pale as death.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxiv.



## *A Brighter World*

As, round an olive-bearing messenger  
The gathering people crowd, above, beneath,  
Shunning no push or jostle to get near,  
So did those bliss-bound wandering spirits come  
Around us, greet us, and besiege us there,  
And seemed to have forgot their halidome.

Now one pressed forward, with such manifest  
Affection and desire, that merely from  
His gesture bloomed my hope to be embraced.  
O unsubstantial phantoms of the eye!

Three times my out-thrown, circling arms encased  
A vacancy, — and smote me for reply.

My wonderment was written on my face;  
And then the shade retreated smilingly,  
I following after at an eager pace,  
Until he gently bade me pause. I looked again,

Recognized, and besought him to stand still.  
'As in the flesh I loved thee,' quoth he then,  
'I love thee clear of it: so have thy will.  
But how art thou come here?' 'Casella mine,'

I said, 'I go my journey up this hill:  
Then to my home again. But what of *thine*?'

And he to me, 'I suffered nothing ill  
At Ostia where the Tiber turns to brine,  
But waited for the Angel's ferrying,  
And by that friendly aid was garnered in.

'Tis toward that port he ever aims his wing  
To fetch the gathering spirits.' Then said I  
'If in thy newer life thou dost retain

## Dante

Thy sweet and amorous skill in minstrelsy  
That once could lull each passion of my brain,  
Let it, I do beseech thee, soothe me now,  
That soul and body may enjoy thy strain  
To clear this journey's anguish from my brow.'<sup>1</sup>  
*'Within my mind Love holds his reasonings.'*<sup>1</sup>  
Thus he began, so sweet, so dulcet-low,  
That yet the ditty in my bosom rings.  
My Master and myself and all the rest  
Appeared to lose the thought of other things,  
Content with this; and listened like the blest,  
Enraptured by the singer and the song.  
When lo, the Old Apostle toward us pressed,  
Crying, 'What's this! Ye lazy loitering throng!  
Ye'll stand a-gazing? What indifference!'

When quiet doves are feeding side by side  
Intent on gathering up each grain or tare,  
With scarce a gesture of their wonted pride,  
If something comes that puts their heart in fear,  
They rise and leave the food,— in deeper dread  
Of greater mischief dangerously near,  
Even so, those innocents but lately dead  
Forewent the song and toward the Mountain straight  
They streamed like men in flight who knew not  
where they fled:  
Nor was our own departure less precipitate.

<sup>1</sup> The first line of a canzone of Dante's.

## VI

### SUDDEN DEATH

THERE is one great and wholesome deliverance which the soul of the modern man has passed through: he has thrown off the Fear of Death. Across the sky of antiquity there hung ever the gloomy shadow of a Hereafter that was uncertain and probably unpleasant. Whatever Hades or Sheol may have meant to any believer or unbeliever of ancient times, they represented a sad makeshift for all that was obviously enjoyable in this world. Even Horace cannot contemplate death with perfect equanimity. It is a disagreeable subject and it preoccupies him not a little.

The developments of doctrine and of discipline in the Christian Church magnified both the joys and the sufferings of a Hereafter to the point of incandescence; and, by persuading men that the matter was of greater importance than anything in the actual world, the Church all but transplanted both these future joys and future pains into current experience. So terrific was this strange perversion of man's imagination that it continued to dominate many Protestant sects down to the Eighteenth Century; and the preoccupations of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards as to future

## *Dante*

rewards and punishments differ rather in form than in substance from the teachings of the Roman Church in the Thirteenth Century. To be prepared for death was the main purpose of life.

During mediæval times, when every possible circumstance was covered with a network of theory, all of life depended on repentance, however momentary, before the last shutting of a man's eyes. Hence the horror of sudden death, which appears as one of those dreaded evils against which prayers are still offered up in certain of our Protestant churches. In the meantime men at large have come to look on death itself with calmness, and on sudden death as perhaps a better end than a protracted dying; and most religious-minded persons are now content to accept death in whatever form it may occur as the best death *for them*, coming as it does from the hand of God.

Dante took part in the famous battle of Campaldino, where Buonconte was killed; and, according to Leonardo Bruni, 'fought vigorously on horseback in the front rank, where he was exposed to very great danger; for the first shock of battle was between the opposing troops of horse, in which the Aretine cavalry charged the Florentine horsemen with such fury, that they were borne down, broken and routed, and driven back upon the foot-souldiers.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Toynbee, *Life of Dante*, p. 78.

## *Sudden Death*

<sup>1</sup>I parted from the group and went my way,  
Close following in the footprints of my Guide,  
When one behind me spoke: 'Behold a ray  
That casts a shadow by that pilgrim's side!  
(Pointing at me, —) 'He is a living thing.'  
And still on me and it he gazed wide-eyed,  
At me and at the shadow, marveling.  
'Your hesitation shows upon your face;  
What signifies to you their whispering,'  
My Master said, 'that you relax your pace?  
Fall in behind me! Let men say their say;  
Stand *thou* as a tower, firm upon his base,  
Proof against winds that, buffet as they may,  
Shake not his crown. For in the teeming mind  
Thought sprouts on thought deferring the assay  
Of some great purpose, which lies blurred be-  
hind.'  
What could I answer save 'Behold, I come'?  
And say it while my tint betrayed the kind  
Of shame that gained the prodigal a home.  
Meanwhile, in coasting up along the plain  
Where many moving, shadowy figures roam,  
We met two bands that in alternate strain  
Were singing *Miserere* as they trod,  
Each taking up in turn the same refrain,  
'Have mercy upon me,— on me, O God';  
Which changed to one long dismal raucous 'Oh'  
Soon as they saw my shadow on the sod.

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, v.



## *Dante*

And two of them ran forth in haste to know:—  
‘Tell us what manner of men ye be,’ said they.  
‘This man is living: ye may tell them so,’  
Replied the Master, ‘if they stand at bay  
Seeing his shadow, let them come more nigh.  
What courtesy they show he can repay.’  
Never did silent flashes from the sky  
Of cloud-encumbered summer evening gleam,  
Or falling lights that streak the dusk on high  
In August, move more nimbly than the stream  
Of their response; their wheeling up the dune  
Was like a charge of cavalry in a dream.  
‘These multitudes press forward for a boon,’  
The poet whispered; ‘While they cluster round  
List to their questions, but keep moving on.’  
‘O thou,’ cried one, ‘that toward thy bliss art bound  
In the same body that was thine at birth,  
See if some friend among our ranks be found,  
That thou may’st bear his message back to earth.  
Alas, thou hastenest! — we died in sin  
By sudden death’s eclipse, yet know the worth  
Of penitence. Or e’er the dark shut in  
Forever on our closing eyes, light smiled  
From Heaven and toward that light we win:  
Through ruth and pardon God is reconciled  
In our desire to see Him face to face.  
‘O ye’ said I, ‘whose bliss shall be fulfilled,  
I know no one of you. Yet by the grace  
Of my Great Guide, whose footing teaches mine

## *Sudden Death*

From world to world the upward path to trace,  
Ask as ye list; I'll do what ye design.'

Then one began, 'Whatever man thou art,  
We trust thee without oaths; thou'lt prove benign  
In all that's possible. Thy tender heart  
Already beats a welcome to our prayers.  
If I speak first, I speak but as a part  
Of other's hopes, mingling my voice with theirs.  
I conjure thee if e'er thou saw'st the strand  
Which Carlo's Kingdom with Romagna shares,  
Let prayer go heavenward from my native land  
In Fano, that my sins be mortified;  
Albeit in Padua the wounds were planned  
Through which my life flowed from me in a tide  
By d'Este, — for some grudge I had not earned, —  
While I in seeming safety did abide.  
Had I but fled toward Mira, had I spurned  
The lowlands, I'd to-day be safe and sound;  
But in my false security I turned  
Toward Oriaco and the marshy ground.  
Fighting and fleeing I long time withstood  
Their onslaught, till beneath my feet I found  
The mere, where leaping hounds and clinging mud  
Embroided, o'ermastered me, and as I fell,  
Dismembered me into a lake of blood.'  
Another cried 'O may your hopes foretell  
Success Above in all for which you came,  
If but your pity aid my hopes as well!

## *Dante*

Of Feltro, I: Buonconte is my name.

Giovanna cares not; of the rest, — not one!  
And here I lurk, bowed down in hopeless shame.'

'Was't force,' I asked, 'or chance, that, lost and  
lone,

You strayed from Campaldino's foughten field,

And of your grave and ending nought was known?'

'Oh,' he replied, 'through skyey meads untilled

The Archian runs, — a rill 'neath mountain walls;

Beyond, the Apennines hold up their shield,

And Archiano into Arno falls.

There, where their names commingle, I arrive

Streaming with blood, while every step recalls

The wound that tells me I am still alive.

Then, knowing death was on me, I gave o'er,  
Muttering 'Maria,' — all I could contrive, —

And fell a heap of flesh and nothing more.

I tell thee truth, and do thou bear the tale

Back to the living. From the shining floor

Of heaven an angel, veering toward the vale

Seized me, and next, a fiend on the other side

Cried out 'Shall one last little tear avail

To save his soul alive! But I'll provide

The obsequies that grace the rest of him.'

Thou knowest how the vaporious moistures ride  
Upon the pregnant air, — brooding and dim, —

But, rising higher where they meet the chill

Convert themselves to rain, and overbrim.

That fiend of evil thought and wicked will

## *Sudden Death*

Inspired a purpose in the mists and wind  
Which nature lent him power to fulfill,  
Till the great valley was oppressed and blind  
With heavy clouds and drifts that steam and smoke.  
As evening fell the lightnings played and shined  
From Pratomagno to the Giant Yoke.  
The skies discharged their burden and there fell  
Rain in a deluge, while the ditches broke,  
And rivers ran in torrents toward the swell  
Of the great royal stream, which made a sound  
In onset like a plunging water-fall.  
My frozen corpse the blustering Archian found,  
And nosed it into Arno; and the Cross  
Upon my breast the savage stream unbound,  
(For so I laid my arms to meet the loss  
Of life in life's last hour). Now doth he roil  
And roll me, drag me, whirl and toss,  
On bank and bottom kneading in the soil;  
And in an angle on a stretch of sand,  
Pinioned and heaped me over with his spoil.'

'Ah,' cried another, 'when in the upper land  
Thou restest from the road that wearieeth,  
Forget not Pia.' Then her ring she scanned.  
'Siena gave me life; Maremma, death:  
He knows me who placed that upon my hand.'

## VII

### SORDELLO

THOSE parian bits in Dante which recall the Greek spirit are often surrounded by gargoyles, and his sublimities followed by a grimace. The almost insane hatred that he felt toward his fellow Florentines, and his fantastic conviction that some German Emperor could and should put an end to the miseries of civic life in Italy, amount to a disease which is apt to break out at any moment in bitter denunciations of which the following canto gives a sample.

The incoherence of his language here is due to the fact that he first addresses Florence; that he next mentions Justinian as the type of the early Byzantine Emperors, whose function it was to ride and control Italy as if she were an unruly horse; that he next rebukes the Popes for trying to get into the saddle; next excoriates the more modern German Emperors for not doing their duty; next calls upon Christ, whom he designates as 'Highest Jove'; and finally returns to belabor Florence; — and all this without making use of clear phrases to explain his transitions. His magnificent portrait of Sordello, which is the despair of any translator, seems to have been intentionally used by the poet to heighten the effect of his vituperation.



## *Sordello*

The interlude concerning Sordello comes on the heel of a discussion on the efficacy of prayer, as to which Virgil has referred the poet to Beatrice, whom he is soon to see at the top of the mountain — Beatrice being, of course, Theology.

Virgil says:

<sup>1</sup> 'But dost thou understand? I'd have thee know  
That Beatrice awaits us on the height  
In smiling ecstasy,' 'O let us go!  
All my fatigues,' I cried, 'have taken flight.  
And lo, the Mount begins to cast a shade:  
Our very utmost must be done to-night.'  
'You misconceive the case,' the poet said,  
'We'll do our best; and yet yon sinking sun  
Will in tomorrow's brightness be arrayed,  
And cast your shadow, ere that height be won.  
But see yon silent soul who stands at bay  
Glancing toward us, companionless, alone:  
He will inform us of the shortest way.'  
We came to him. Ah, soul of Lombardy,  
How lofty and disdainful on that day  
Glowed the slow weight and motion of thine eye!  
For not a word he spake, but in his mien  
Paused like a lion as we drew more nigh.  
Virgil addressed him with the hope to learn  
What path our further journey best became.  
Yet he no answer gave, but asked in turn

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, vi, 46.

## Dante

Who we might be and from what land we came.  
The gentle lips of Virgil scarce had traced  
‘Mantua,’ when that rapt spirit, at the name,  
Sprang from his post, and cried in loving haste,  
‘O Mantuan, thy city is mine own!  
I am Sordello.’ And the twain embraced.

Ah, Italy! the Kingdom of the lost,  
A mistress-slave upon a brothel’s throne,  
A ship without a pilot, tempest-tossed!  
That courtly soul with eager happiness  
Scarce heard the syllables which moved him most,  
Yet leaped his joyous welcome to express  
*Among the dead! And now, alive in thee,*  
No one is warless: the same walls compress  
The men that murder and the men that flee.  
Search, miserable woman, thy domain  
Round every shore, then look within and see  
If Peace hath joy in thee!  
In vain Justinian curbed thy bridle-rein!  
The saddle’s empty. Is thy shame the less?  
Shall Cæsar wear the Imperial crown in vain  
And God’s intendments end in wilderness?  
The creature rears, and *Priests* would master it!  
They who were meant to pray, to fast, to bless,  
Now seek to grasp the headstall and the bit!  
O, Teuton Albert! who abandonest  
The untamed animal, thy righteous seat  
Had been upon the shoulders of the beast.

## *Sordello*

Yea, a just judgment from the stars doth fall  
Upon thy race; for each succeeding feast

That crowns a king forebodes his funeral;  
And while your dynasty, in lust and greed  
Is heaping wealth beyond the Alpine wall,  
The Garden of the Empire runs to seed.

Come, careless man, and view them in your  
round, —

Your Montagues, your Capulets that bleed, —

Monaldi, Filipeschi, — staunch their wound!

Come, cruel one, and view the oppressors' gains, —

Your gentles and your nobles gone to ground, —  
Your Santafigiore bound in alien chains!

Come, view thy Rome, thy lone, neglected mate,  
Thy widowed wife, who day and night complains,  
'Why hath my Cæsar left me desolate!'

If, hard of heart, yet tender of thy fame,

Thou look'st upon the children of thy State,  
Pity may touch thee in a touch of shame.

And, — may I ask it — O! thou Highest Jove  
Who for our sake on earth wast crucified,

Are thy just eyes withdrawn to things above,  
Or is some blessed outcome signified

In the abyss of thine Eternal Love,  
Beyond the ken of those for whom you died?

For every town in Italy is pill'd  
By tyrants, and each plundering malcontent

Is a Marcellus, — till his pouch be filled!

## *Dante*

Florence, I know that thou wilt find content

In this digression: (*Thee* I cannot mean,  
Thanks to thy subtlety in argument!

Justice may be in man, yet lurk unseen  
If he lack wit to bend the talker's bow;

But Wisdom's tongue's in every Florentine.)  
In other cities men at times say No

To public office; but in ours reply,  
Before we ask them, 'I accept the blow.'

Therefore, rejoice, my Florence, utterly!  
Rich art thou, peaceful, wise —

Do I speak true?

Then let the naked facts give me the lie!  
Sparta and Attica, compared to you

In all their laws and civil government,  
Gave but a hint of what 'twere best to do!

In cautious foresight you are eminent:  
October builds; November clears away!

How many times dost thou revoke, revise  
Laws, coinage, customs, posts of yesterday.

And if light ever shine to make thee wise,  
Thou'lt see thy likeness — like it as ye may —  
In some sick wench, pillowed amid her woes,  
Who turns, to cheat the anguish of repose.

## VIII

### VIRGIL'S FAREWELL

IN one of the lower circles of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil have been joined by the Latin poet Statius who accompanies them to the top of the mountain. Here they find the Garden of Eden; and here Virgil's duties as guide, philosopher, and friend come to an end. He has till now been the intellectual and moral adviser whose mind is full of the wisdom of the times before Christ; and his post is soon to be filled by Beatrice, who represents Christian ideas and especially Theology. Throughout their ascent of the mountain the travelers are obliged to stop still at sundown.

<sup>1</sup>Sheer through the living rock a stairway rose  
In such direction that the sinking sun  
Cast our last shadows up the quarried close.  
I and my sages plodded bravely on,  
And of the lowest steps had made assay,  
When twilight told us that the day was done.  
But ere behind us all the watery way  
Of the immense horizon's gathering night  
Had spread its tented conquest over day,  
Our weary bodies on the slabs we dight;

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, xxvii, 64-75.



## Dante

For Nature in that place denies the power, —  
Though not the wish, — to mount by evening light.

<sup>1</sup> Little of the outer world could thence be seen;  
But through the open shaft the stars appeared  
Bigger and brighter than they e'er had been.

Thinking on them, and watching where they  
peered,  
I sank to sleep, — such sleep as often brings,  
To constant minds, in visions bright or weird,  
Foreknowledge of the morrow's happenings.

About the hour when Venus o'er the sea  
Casts her first glow against the mountain height  
A fair young girl seemed walking in a mead  
Gathering flowers, who in her singing said,  
'Let all men know that I am Leah hight,  
Who move, and weave a garland for my head,  
To greet my mirror. Rachel never stirs  
From gazing at her own bright eyes in *hers*,  
While I with busy hands my brows adorn:  
For thought to her is action, while to me  
Action is thought, from my nativity.'

And now the leaping brilliance of the morn,  
Loved by all travelers who homeward fare  
And lodge each nightfall nearer to their bourn,  
Had put to flight all shadows, and my share

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, xxvii, 88-142.

## *Virgil's Farewell*

Of dreams along with them. I waked to find  
My mighty friends already standing there.  
'That long and dear endeavor of mankind,—  
That fruit which mortals seek from bough to  
bough,—

This day shall still the famine in thy mind.'

The voice that spoke was Virgil's, and I trow  
That never boon or gift on festal night  
Had brought more happiness to man below.

I made such eager haste to gain the height

That after that, at every upward stride,  
I felt my wings grow stronger for the flight.

And soon, above the world and side by side  
We stood upon the summit of the climb.

My Master fixed on me his vision wide,  
'My son, thou now hast seen the fires of Time  
And of Eternity; and come thou art  
Where, in the light beyond, my sight grows dim.

My thoughts and cunning have done all their  
part:

Beyond these steep and narrow paths of mine  
Thou walkest: take thy guidance from thy  
heart!

Behold the sun upon thy brow doth shine.

This greensward and the hedges,— nurseries  
That rush to blossom from the sod divine, —

Shall be thy chamber till the joyous eyes  
Of her who came in tears to Hell's dark shade  
Shall find and take thee up to Paradise.

*Dante*

Expect no further word or sign from me:  
Thy will is straight and strong and sane and free:  
    'Twere now a crime to trust to other's aid:  
I crown thee o'er thyself, and mitre thee.'

## IX

### THE FLIGHT UPWARD

THE last six cantos of the 'Purgatorio' are devoted to scenes in the Garden of Eden or Terrestrial Paradise on the top of the Mountain. Here Dante meets Matilda, who guides him upstream along the margin of the river Lethe — she being on the farther bank. He next witnesses a great pageant or allegory representing the Church and Empire. Here it is that he meets Beatrice (who is also on the farther bank), and a conversation takes place between them which is the crucial scene in the 'Divine Comedy.' Dante confesses his sins with grief that is so poignant and personal as to be all but out of key with the abstract and architectonic setting of the scene. At the end of his interview with Beatrice, he is submerged and drawn through the stream of Lethe. After witnessing further pageants he drinks of the Waters of Eunoë, through which he is prepared to rise to the stars. Thus closes the 'Purgatorio.'

The first two Cantos of the 'Paradiso' describe the passage of Beatrice and Dante from the top of the Mount Purgatory, first through the Region of Fire to the Sphere of the Moon, and next to the Sphere of Mercury. After each of these flights Beatrice delivers

## *Dante*

a lecture: the first is on the nature of gravity and the second on the cause of the Spots on the Moon. The geography of the Moon had, indeed, plagued the world's natural philosophers for some thousands of years. In one of Lucian's Dialogues she complains wearily to a visiting scientist that she wishes the earth-people would let her alone. I have omitted both these discussions, and have also taken the liberty of transferring a short and genial 'Address to the Reader' from the opening of the Second Canto to the opening of the First. This little address closely resembles the one at the beginning of the 'Purgatorio.'

After stating his intention to describe the highest regions of Heaven, Dante makes an 'Invocation to the Divine Spirit,' in which classic poetry and mediæval philosophy are mingled, together with a reference to his own recent personal conversion. The whole passage is charged with volcanic sincerity and followed by a description of the two flights upward.

To these two flights I have appended still a third flight from a later Canto of the 'Paradiso,' namely, the opening of Canto XXIII. The reader will observe that while the metaphors as to the transmutation of what is mortal into immortality are varied, the idea conveyed is exactly the same in all three cases. This is also true in many other passages of the poem which touch upon the same subject.



## *The Flight Upward*

<sup>1</sup> O ye rapt listeners to unearthly things  
Who, in your tiny skiff, with eager glee  
Follow my taller bark that sails and sings,  
Turn to your shores again! O shun the sea!  
For once ye lose me, ye'll be wildered there.  
Apollo guides, Minerva governs me;  
The Muses show the stars by which I steer.  
But O ye other few who lift your head  
Betimes toward Heaven and taste, ere death be  
near,  
That never-sating and celestial bread,  
Shake out your sails th' adventurous voyage to  
take,  
And at my keel the gurgling furrow thread  
Before the lapping waves efface my wake.

<sup>2</sup> The glory of the Universe is He  
Whose glory beats and shines through every sphere,  
With less or greater visibility:  
And in that Region where His light is clear  
Was I, and heard and saw what none may know  
Thereafter in our lower atmosphere.  
For as the loving mind draws near that glow  
The intellect dissolves as in a dream;  
And Memory gropes in Reason's overthrow.  
'Tis true, some treasures as I went along  
I garnered in my thought, hoarding the gleam  
To be the subject of my further song.

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, II, 1-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 1-81.

## *Dante*

Oh, good Apollo, fill me with the might  
That earns the blessed laurel! Let thy tongue  
In whispered notes sustain my final flight.  
One of Parnassus' peaks I did attain  
In other bouts of song; but entering here  
On this Olympian field, I seek the twain.  
Speak in my bosom, breathe upon my brow  
The force that when old Marsyas dared his flute  
to blow,  
Rived his live body from its fleshly skein!  
O Power Divine, if once my lips thou touch,  
With but an echo from thy blest abodes,  
All of my after-singing shall be such  
That thou shalt find me in thy sacred woods,  
Crowning me with the leaves of Daphne's tree,  
Made worthy of them by my theme and thee.  
If, Father, they be seldom culled to acclaim  
Some Emperor's, — or Poet's, — victory,  
The fault is Man's indifference to fame;  
Yet surely, when the Bay drives mortals mad,  
With thirsting after its immortal name,  
The joyous god of Delphi is made glad.  
A mighty blaze follows a little spark:  
Perchance some voice shall rise, when I am dead,  
And sing till all Parnassus murmurs, 'Hark!'

<sup>1</sup> 'Twas midday and the mountain-top was won,  
And Beatrice with an eagle's dauntless eye

<sup>1</sup> The astronomy of lines 37 to 45 is omitted.

## *The Flight Upward*

Was gazing fixedly upon the sun,  
While, like the up-rush of reflected light,  
That seems to seek the flames from which it shone,  
My eyes and mind turned sunward at the sight,  
As one may do in that primeval spot,  
Eden, the home of our nativity, —  
Though here on earth our vision bears it not.  
I looked not long, yet on all sides could see  
The sparklets that o'er molten metal play  
When from the forge it spouts exultingly.  
And suddenly all seems more bright than day,  
And Beatrice is standing with her eyes  
On the Eternal Wheels, and mine seek hers, —  
Abandoning the bosom of the skies.  
And as I gaze the Godhead in me stirs,  
Transmutes, and deifies my mortal state.  
Was't truly I, that Thy redeeming might,  
O Love that rulest Heaven, did re-create? —  
Thou knowest, who didst lift me to the light.

<sup>1</sup> The inborn hunger for God's Governance  
Impelled us upward through the brilliant air  
As fast as light, or as a skyward glance;  
She looked upon the sun, and I on her;  
And in what time an arrow needs, perchance,  
For aim, discharge and impact, — we were there.  
Wonderful things were opened on my view  
That caught and claimed my fantasy, and she

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, II, 19-42.

## *Dante*

My every thought, my every passion knew.

In joyous beauty now she turned to me,  
Saying, 'God lifts us to the spheres of light:

Bend toward the beam He sends thee, gratefully.'  
Meseemed a cloud enclosed us, dense and bright,

Firm, polished, like a diamond in the sun:  
The eternal pearl received us in our flight

As water takes a ray when shined upon.  
Thus may one come to see how in the Height  
Man's nature and God's Essence are made one.

<sup>1</sup>The bird who in her leafy paradise

Broods o'er her blessed nestlings while dark night  
Engulfs all nature,—thinking 'twill be bliss

To see and feed them in the coming light,—  
Fore-runs the time, and on an open spray

Expects the dawn that makes her toil delight  
And watches fixedly for break of day

When a new sun shall glad the firmament.  
Even so, with eyes up-cast and far away,

My lady stood, erect, alert, attent.  
I was like one who, losing half his gains,—

(Seeing her in suspense and wonderment)  
Lays hold on hope,—for only hope remains.

And now the deepening bosom of the sky  
A steadily-increasing splendor stains,

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, xxiii, 1-39.

## *The Flight Upward*

And Beatrice speaks, 'Behold the panoply  
Of Christ Triumphant! To this threshing-floor  
The circling planets wheel their husbandry.'  
She seemed on fire: her brow a radiance wove:  
Her eyes with blazing ecstasy shone wide.

As when the rising moon at full smiles o'er  
The lesser nymphs that in her silver tide  
Haunt the eternal reaches of the night,  
I saw above the myriad lamps enskied  
One single sun that fed them with his light.  
The vivid force of that celestial fire, ,  
And the bright Substance Self oppressed my sight,  
(Oh, Beatrice, my guide, my heart's desire!)  
And she, 'The rays of Life that make you cower,  
To many a sinking soul have brought rebirth  
With irresistible, Eternal Power,  
Opening a highway between heaven and earth.'



## X

### THE TEACHER

ACCORDING to English instinct poetry must expound itself as it proceeds; and a poet is not permitted to plunge his reader into Purgatory — which is Dante's great privilege — whenever he feels the impulse to do so. Moreover, the genius of English literature is sunny. A warm, luminous haze of good nature envelops it, from the Wife of Bath and John Falstaff to Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Punch. The spirit of this whole literature is neither rational nor dogmatic, but a spirit of dalliance. I confess I wake with a start when the shade of Dante looks in at the cottage window where I had fallen asleep with a copy of 'Twelfth Night' in my hand.

From this point of view the peculiar beauties of the 'Paradiso' are as foreign to English sentiment as are the horrors of the 'Inferno' or the regenerative ingenuities of the 'Purgatorio.' All of these scenes, as we approach them with our hearts and memories filled with the genial traditions of English letters, seem to be overcharged and didactic, and Dante appears to us as 'an unaccountable sort of fellow who must have been bilious.'<sup>1</sup> It seems possible that Dante's lack of

<sup>1</sup> Leigh Hunt, quoted by Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature*, I, p. 117.

## *The Teacher*

humor and of kindliness may shorten the skirts of his fame as time goes on, and as that passionate interest in the Middle Ages which marked the Nineteenth Century begins to decline.

Dante pushed the pristine conception of the poet as a teacher so far as often to become himself a mere schoolmaster. In this he differs from the greatest poets of antiquity and of modern times, who have taught us among other things that a poet is an entertainer as well as a teacher, and is somehow related not only to Hesiod and to Orphic wisdom, but to the ballad-singer, the *jongleur*, and the jester.

Thus the priestly duty of instruction has, with Dante, swallowed the humaner poetic functions — the lighter touches, the humorous gleam, or the helpless truth that evokes its own background of sympathy in the reader. For in Dante everything is intentional. Homer and Virgil and Shakespeare — even the Greek tragedians — rely upon their story. But with Dante the story is a dead body to be dissected. In other words, there is no cap-and-bells about Dante. He is more in earnest than ever a man was before. He is as unbending as Lucifer, and his chief purpose is to cut his name on the Walls of Time. We feel as we read him that he is about to engrave it upon *us*.

He walks on the stage to deliver a lecture, and keeps his personality ever between his audience and his subject. This is a defect in art, if you will; but, then, he

## *Dante*

has a greater talent for exposition than any man ever possessed. One may not like his theme, which seems to some readers mechanical; one may resent his certitude about everything; for he is a man who has, as it were, no opinions, but only certitudes. The stones in the street, when such a man passes by, rise and cry after him. 'A man's a man for a' that!' And yet as an expositor he is transcendent. The intellectuals of the world are held spellbound by his exposition, and the populace by the pictures which he throws on his screen.

## XI

### THE EGOIST

THE chief fact that we know about any very great man is that he has touched the imagination of the world. He illumined his epoch, and thereafter each new mind finds in him the light of its own experience. Thus the historians labor in the wake of a popular instinct. No amount of investigation suffices to place and determine him. Once started, the search becomes a province for exploration and a field for romance. Men educate themselves in striving to understand the striking characters of history. The chase brings joy, although the quarry always escapes.

The Past is so successfully vanishing at every instant that one has difficulty in remembering what one meant by a letter written yesterday. To assume that one knows history, and endeavor to expound a man by a resort to the history of his times, is to express an enigma in hieroglyphics. Learning, itself, is in truth only the world's most charming and most civilizing illusion.

One thing, however, we are sure of: — Any character that appeals to the universal dramatic sense must surely represent a type. Posterity will accept nothing but *types* as its figures in history and literature, as for instance Alexander the Conqueror; Sol-

## *Dante*

omon the wise; Odysseus the Cunning; Hector the Pure; Achilles the Self-willed. For years I have vaguely wondered to what human type Dante belongs, that at every moment, and whether one likes him or not, he is so interesting. It will not help us to answer, The Poet; for there are too many types of poet and of poetry. There is Theocritus and Calderon and Verlaine and Crabbe. One must search for some commonplace human type which can be illustrated in the nearest village.

Dante belongs to the type of the Solitary Egoist. It is the solitary boy, Dante, who somehow escaped the early pressures and buffetings that make men hardy, whom we must remember; for this recluse remains within the poet — a creature to whom a personal experience signifies a universal law, a reality, the only reality, — in fact the truth. Whatever experience he had woven into the expanding spider-web of his conceptions, became to Dante a part of the Cosmos; and whoever laid hands on it was an enemy to Truth. Nothing but an inward intensity of this sort can explain his phenomenal memory. Everything remembered by Dante is to him of equal importance; and if he puts the obscure Trojan, Pallas, among the founders of the Roman Empire, it is because the thought has passed through his head twenty years before, and has taken its place among the eternal verities. If you question him, he will be irritated and mutter, 'You are a fool. Read deeper.'



## *The Egoist*

Dante has had no playmates in his youth. His acquaintance, outside of a few artistic, literary, or musical natures, seems to be confined to titled persons and to such as live in castles. He dislikes the common herd, and if he mentions a peasant it is generally to bark at his rags, like the little dogs in 'King Lear.' The learned have suspected that his family was not so important as he imagined — and this for a reason that would have cast Dante into a quandary, namely, that his ancestors were not exiled during a certain Florentine house-cleaning when the great men of their party were expelled. Ergo they were protected by their obscurity. Exile in those days was a sort of title to nobility. And here a curious fact faces us. Dante has nowhere a word of pity for his fellow exiles.

After one or two unsuccessful attempts to reënter Florence, the city became in his mind a malignant and ungrateful ditch; and he intimates that his own ancestors were not Florentines, but Romans who had come to Florence from Fiesole. In fact Dante's personal history so dominates his philosophy that one comes to look askance at even his most abstract ideas; and if we find him hanging on the lips of Aquinas for an answer to that most difficult question, the salvation of the virtuous heathen who lived before the time of Christ, we greatly fear that Dante cares not a penny about the heathen, but wishes to get the O.K. of Aquinas for his own theories on the sub-

## Dante

ject. He reveals his innermost self both consciously and unconsciously. He says frankly that he abandoned the half-written 'Convivio' (which was framed on the plan of the 'Vita Nuova' as a series of comments upon his own poems), for fear of *infamia*. Whether we take this *infamia* to mean a bad name among men or a bad standing with God, the word carries the same idea of that self-perfectionism which is Dante's preoccupation.

All his passions are of a self-regardant nature, and two of them are very noble passions, namely, his penitence, and his gratitude to persons who have been kind to him. This very self-centered quality is one source of Dante's popularity. He is the archetype of the Introspective Writer and his works are a *journal intime*.

## XII

### DANTE'S OBSESSION

THE 'Divine Comedy' is Dante's political testament and personal justification. Indeed, this aspect of the poem is at times so obvious as to obscure its more poetic meanings. The plan and conduct of it seems to give a new and somewhat elaborated reading of the Book of Job — one in which the Patriarch finally triumphs by solving the enigma in his own favor and blazoning his justification through the voice — the many voices — of God.

Among all the afflictions and disappointments of Dante's career the most pathetic is the almost total lack of friendship, of friends and friendliness, which his life suggests. The anecdotes about him represent him as repelling human contacts, and it would seem that one purpose of the 'Divine Comedy' was to show that, if on earth the poet has had many enemies and few friends, nevertheless there were friends waiting to welcome him on the other side of the grave, namely, the great saints, great intellects, and great rulers of history. These persons at least looked with favor on him, and he proposes in the 'Divine Comedy' to introduce them to the reader.

This is the theme that runs through the whole work. The first Canto of the 'Inferno' outlines the

## Dante

plan of the story, which is as follows: The Virgin Mary has sent Saint Lucy, who is the patron saint of eye-troubles (and Dante had trouble with his eyes), to Beatrice, who has approached Virgil on the general subject of Dante's difficulties and has sent Virgil down to meet the poet in the *Darkling Wood* and lead him skyward. During the whole of the 'Inferno' and the 'Purgatorio' the underlying unity of the Itinerary is somewhat obscured by the variety and brilliancy of its episodes, although the special interest of the Heavenly Powers in Dante is from time to time referred to. The introduction of the author's friends to the public begins seriously as soon as Dante and Beatrice arrive in Paradise. Every one there has heard of Dante. The Emperor Justinian improvises for him a magnificent lecture on the Roman Empire from the time of Constantine down to date, and brings in some severe remarks about Charles II, King of Naples, who was one of Dante's particular aversions.<sup>1</sup> Carlo Martello the son of this same aversion, who is one of Dante's adorations, soon appears. He had spent more than three weeks in Florence in 1294 and recites the first line of one of Dante's early poems, saying that all the spirits in the Heaven of Venus (where the scene occurs) love Dante.<sup>2</sup> The next persons of importance into whose presence the poet is ushered are the theologians. They appear as *Lights* disposed in two concentric circles which dance about

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, VI.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.

## *Dante's Obsession*

Dante and Beatrice and occasionally emit musical sounds. Their circulation soon stops and one of the Lights addressing Dante says politely, 'Since the ray of grace — whereat true love is kindled, . . . doth so glow in thee as to conduct thee upon that stairway which no one descends except to rise again [that is to say, Dante is ultimately booked for Heaven], I will tell thee that my neighbor on the right is Albertus Magnus and I am Thomas Aquinas.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas thereupon points out to Dante twelve of the Church's greatest theologians, including Gratian, Peter Lombard, Dionysius the Areopagite, Boëthius, King Solomon; and a little later he gives two more long discourses in which he develops Dante's views on the monastic question. Saint Bonaventura does the like, and names Chrysostom, Anselm, and many more of the Celestials who are present.

It was this scene that first made me feel that the support for his own views which Dante sought to draw from the Celestials was more personal than a writer on theology is apt to claim from the Church Fathers. It is not merely for his *thought* that Dante claims approval, but for his passions, his rancors, and his fancies. The whole scene furnishes another example of that quality in Dante's mind which made him unable to deal with any subject in an abstract way. To him every subject is a portion of himself and of his destiny.

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, x, 99.



## *Dante*

The tremendous importance of the individuals whom he here marshals behind his opinions gives one a shock. It would be hard to call up any image that would present to the American mind what the names of the saints and theologians mentioned in this convocation meant to Dante's contemporaries. Albertus Magnus and Aquinas had died during the poet's lifetime, and the reputation of both these Doctors towered over the Europe of that day much as Mont Blanc towers over Switzerland. They were the giants of the Mediæval Epoch, during which there was, in the popular mind, no distinction between politics and religion. Aquinas was canonized two years after Dante's death, and no man in Europe has, either before or after him, been regarded with such universal reverence as followed Aquinas to his grave, in the forty-seventh year of his age.

Perhaps if some unsuccessful and aging and seedy American publicist, whose political ambitions Fate had thwarted, and who had spent the last half of his life as an on-hanger of indulgent rich patrons, despised — or worse — forgotten by an age in which he had not been able to cut a dignified figure; if such an American should publish a vision in which he declared that he had found himself in Heaven at a convention of Luminaries, where one of them had stepped forward and said, 'Sir, I know you well. You are destined to become President of the United States. My friend on the right here is Benjamin Franklin, and I am George

## *Dante's Obsession*

Washington. Over yonder you see Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, and by himself, in meditation, the thoughtful giant, Abraham Lincoln'; and if Washington should thereupon proceed to make two political speeches, giving the main points of the said seedy publicist's unpopular political faith, that publicist would have scored the same sort of point that Dante scores against his contemporaries, in the 'Paradiso,' X, XI, and XII.

The conference in Paradise proceeds and is varied by a sacred *ballata* sung and danced by the company. Saint Thomas then gives a private lecture to Dante on certain fine points of the faith,<sup>1</sup> and, at Beatrice's request, Solomon says a few words to him.<sup>2</sup> In all these proceedings Dante is not so much a spectator as a royalty for whom special performances are being given. His tone in the narration is that of the annoying young Joseph, recounting his dream and telling how the sun and moon and the eleven stars had done obeisance to him.

The heavenly music is now stilled, not because it had reached the end of the performance, but in order to encourage Dante to ask more questions; and his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida appears, and 'O my offspring,' says he, 'to whom else but to thee was ever Heaven's gate thrown open twice!'<sup>3</sup> The old gentleman then lapses into a mystical tirade which is above human comprehension; and the first words

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, XIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 28.

## *Dante*

that Dante understands are, 'Blessed be thou, Three in One, who are so courteous to me in the offspring of my body.'<sup>1</sup> Thus it is intimated that the Celestials in gazing on Dante see the Trinity. But Dante is not aware that he has said anything that would excite remark.

Cacciaguida's account of old Florence at the time when the walls enclosed only native citizens, and every one was virtuous and contented, is charming, and shows the depth of the poet's passionate love for his city. Florence, Florence! After Dante's triumphant answers to all Saint Peter's questions in a private and drastic examination concerning his faith,<sup>2</sup> Dante's first words are a cry of hope that the heart of Florence will now at last be melted and that he will be crowned as a poet in his beloved Baptistry. He seems really to have believed that such a personal triumph might come about. He appears to think that his eminence as a poet will enable him to become a factor in the civic life of his native town. There is something ingenuous in this belief that his fellow citizens will forget the rivers of vitriol that he has been pouring on them for many years from his various castles of refuge. As we read the passage from this point of view, we almost suspect that Dante's theology was merely the heavy artillery in his great, magnificent, lifelong campaign for what our politicians call 'recognition.'

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, iv, 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

## *Dante's Obsession*

But Dante's nature was far too complex to allow of any such interpretation. At the time he wrote the 'Paradiso' the thought of a return to Florence was with him no longer an aim, hardly a dream. It had become a Symbol—the symbol of his ultimate, vague triumph. Throughout the 'Divine Comedy' Dante's comforters consistently prophesy his ultimate success. His enemies shall be abased, and he shall have twice as many barns and children as before the afflictions. The 'Paradiso' was written long after his hopes of earthly success had gone down to perdition with the death of the Emperor Henry VII; and yet the prophecies of his ultimate victory continue and multiply. Dante, like Napoleon at Saint Helena, must, out of habit, still labor at his legend after it has exploded. To do so is the only interest in life that is left to either of these strange men.

### XIII

## DANTE'S CHURCH STANDING

To raise the question whether Dante was technically or virtually a heretic (and I have read learned essays on the subject) is to miss the human and important point of the whole question. Dante's attitude toward the Empire and the Papacy was that of a super-autocrat who is above both of them, and holds a commission from on high to regulate the affairs of each. He is the Czar of Religion. Some of Dante's books were on the Index for two or three centuries; but the poet is to-day a *persona grata* at the Vatican, I suppose on the principle of letting bygones be bygones. He was never a man that one could feel much at home with, and I am quite content that my own intercourse with him must be carried on in a one-sided way across six intervening centuries.

To speak of Dante as a Protestant would be so historically inexact as to be offensive. But Dante represents the spirit that was at the bottom of Protestantism, the impulse of a man to decide the religious question for himself, and to accept as much or as little of the Church's teaching as he sees fit. The eternal question is, of course: Which of these parties — the Church, or the believer — shall determine the limits of



## *Dante's Church Standing*

obedience? No Protestant sect ever rejected the whole teaching of Rome. Each sect as it broke away retained some portion of the faith and some semblance of the ritual of Rome. All the seceding sects in every epoch had this in common, that each claimed the right to put in the stakes and boundary-marks themselves. Now Dante felt that he himself was the only man who had ever understood the whole subject; and he would have gone to the flames rather than recant by a hair's breadth — whether as to the nature of grace, or the Donation of Constantine, or the functions of the Emperor. He is tremendously strong on the right of private judgment, and he would willingly have died for the sake of his own private judgment, if it had come in conflict with any other judgment, whether private or public.

I do not think that either Luther, Calvin, or John Knox ever conceived of such supernal opposition to the Papacy as was Dante's bread and meat for many years. All that those northern reformers wanted was to be let alone. But Dante invades and browbeats the Roman Pontiff. He taught the Italians to hate the Vatican, and his influence it was which, more than any other one thing, led to the triumph of the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy in the last century.

In reflecting on the powerlessness of this refugee, whose passage from one noble patron's roof to another's is supposed to have been hastened by his

## *Dante*

proud manners and sharp tongue and whose only weapon was his quill pen, one gradually forms an impression as to the natural power and dimensions of the man till one comes at last almost to agree with Michelangelo that 'A man like him, or a greater, ne'er was born.'

## XIV

### THE COMMENTATORS

THE greatest triumph of Dante has been that his claim to be not only a poet, but a philosopher, is generally allowed. For this ready acceptance of him at his own face value the commentators cannot quite escape the blame.

Dante in his great work has provided both a feast for the lovers of romance and a banquet for the earthworms of literature who are always delving about the roots of history and fertilizing the soil. He comes with Francesca in one hand and Thomas Aquinas in the other. The leisure classes and general readers flock towards him from one side; the grave scholars and historians from the other. These last-named persons are the rescuers and salvage-corps of literature. They are important: they are, indeed, essential. It is they who have preserved the classic world, and without them Homer and Virgil would have been lost to us. But they are not saints or heroes; and Browning was wrong to sing of his Grammarian as one who was 'still loftier than the world suspects, living and dying.' They are men who require a body to work on. It was said of Sainte-Beuve that, towards the end of his life, he was ready to go into the street and claw up the pavement for a new subject.

## Dante

Dante has provided the commentators with the richest field of excavation ever open to them. These diggers and hewers are tough-minded, ambitious men, professional and thorough. Their rôle is to be unimaginative and suspicious; and the result is that in certain ways they become credulous. They swallow Dante's assertions about himself, and believe him to be incapable of oversight or of self-contradiction. They seem to think that he wrote the 'Divine Comedy' at a sitting; and if, in one place, he represents the Waters of Lethe as only efficient when followed by the Waters of Eunoë, and in another place seems to neglect the distinction, the commentators are at hand with such subtle suggestions as to the operation of the two respective draughts that the poetry of the passage evaporates. If Dante most solemnly places on his own brow, in the name of Private Opinion, both the Imperial Crown and the Papal Tiara, a Note reminds us that this can mean no more than that in cases of *conduct* and *conscience* private opinion is to prevail — as if everything in life did not resolve itself into conscience and conduct, and as if Dante had not shown quite clearly what he meant by this coronation in all his acts done in the course of a long life. The truth is that one must gather Dante's meanings, as one gathers the meanings of other men, by putting two and two together, not by drawing pictures of his Supposed Universe, and then hanging his phrases on them as on a Christmas tree.

## *The Commentators*

In acknowledging our debt to the commentators, it seems almost ungracious to say that some of their Notes are harder to follow than the text. This is generally due to the desire of the learned to superpose an artificial diagram above the courses of the rivers in Dante's watershed. His theories and meanings are centralized and flow into a main channel: they are more or less coherent, but are never accurately mathematical. For instance, his preoccupation with Love in all its forms, from the amatory to the celestial, is a part of his poetic genius, and he almost always conveys his exact meaning in regard to any phase of the emotion on which he touches. But we cannot always understand his cataloguing personalities or see why Francesca should be put in the same compartment with Semiramis, or why the victims of the most atrocious forms of human perversity should be assigned to a circle next the top of Mount Purgatory and only just below the Garden of Eden.

Nor can we understand why Dante reserves a corner of Paradise for lovers of a distinctly earthly type. The heaven of the illicit lovers is, as he explains, just within the tip of the Earth's Shadow; and there we find the notorious Cunizza, and the troubadour Folco, who brags of his conquests like a Don Juan, and goes on to remark,<sup>1</sup> 'Yet here we do not repent, but smile; not at the sin, which cometh not again, but at the Power that ordered and provided' — that is to

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, ix, 103-05.



## *Dante*

say the Power that had provided him with his amours. This same Folco points out one of his neighbors in Paradise, namely, Rahab. Rahab, as we know (see Joshua II), was the harlot who let the Israelites into Jericho in return for immunity to her household during the sack of the town. She was absurdly transformed by mediæval legend into one of the ancestors of Christ, and her scarlet thread became typical of the blood of Christ. But Dante's use of her as a symbol of love in his Paradise is hard to reconcile with any ethical, poetic, historical, or theological theory.

If, on the other hand, we regard these questionable assignments from the point of view of poetic license — Francesca to Hades and certain libertines to a prostitution box in Paradise — we can at least surmise how some of them came to be made. To place Francesca in the opening of the poem was a very effective and beautiful use to make of her figure. Her story is told in the jaws of Hell and could hardly have been set against a more effective background. As for Cunizza and the other sinners in Paradise, one must remember that Beatrice and Dante were passing through the Heaven of Venus, and Dante uses the devotees of free-love in what seems to him a decorative and appropriate manner. But on this occasion his genius fails him: the scene is equivocal and unconvincing.

I merely cite these cases as a key to the whole 'Divine Comedy.' All of Dante's assignments of persons to compartments are equally whimsical and

## *The Commentators*

arbitrary; and some of them are made in the spirit of mystification. This is exemplified in the conduct of the Church Father, Pier Damiano,<sup>1</sup> who descends in the form of a luminosity upon a Jacob's Ladder from the upper heavens, and, being questioned by the poet as to just why he, and no other, had been commissioned to meet Dante, replies by going round and round like a millstone and saying that 'no one except God knows.'

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, xxi, 79-96.

## XV

### DEFECTS IN THE 'DIVINE COMEDY' AND CONCLUSION

THE artistic blemishes in Dante are always due to an intrusion of the Personal and often to an exhibition of bad temper. The features of Dante himself shine through most of the speakers in the 'Divine Comedy.' Even his angels speak at times with a kind of brutality or swagger,<sup>1</sup> and Virgil's cruelty on various occasions<sup>2</sup> is an offense against the Republic of Letters for which Dante ought to be put in the stocks. It will not do to make the Middle Ages responsible for the unchivalric temperament of Dante. Men of gentle natures, like Saint Bernard and Saint Francis and Saint Louis, and humanists, like Brunetto Latino and Petrarch and Boccaccio, lived both before and after Dante; and it is probable that these two peculiarly Italian types — the saint and the humanist — existed from the very beginning of the Dark Ages.

Dante stages and organizes his venom. He leaps upon the reader like a jaguar from an overhanging branch. For instance, after he has been sympathetically catechized by Saint James about Hope and by

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, ix, 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 55; xviii, 127-36; xix, 121-27; xx, 25-30; xxix, 85-90.

## *Defects in the Divine Comedy*

Saint John about Love, and the whole party has ascended to a heaven where the Universe seems to be one smile, and Dante has exclaimed, 'O joy! O infinite delight!' — being as it were drunk with the Hosannah which is there sounding — the shadow of his griefs passes across his mind, the heavens themselves turn red with indignation, while Saint Peter curses the modern Papacy in shrewish tones, and the canto closes with Beatrice's promise to the sufferer that before next January these very heavens will be roaring with indignation, and the long-delayed triumph of Dante's ideas will be under way.<sup>1</sup>

Still higher yet in Heaven, in the Empyrean itself, after describing the Celestial Rose and his own unspeakable emotions of happiness as he gazes at it, he suddenly snaps the whip in nine caustic lines about the odious Florentines — an unnecessary, an in-artistic, a bad-hearted digression.<sup>2</sup>

The explosions of Dante's temper may be regarded as the first of his monotonies, or harpings upon an idea or a phrase. Among such monotonies are his fallings as if dead, to express strong emotion; the gnashing of teeth and self-mutilation, to express despair; his too frequent descriptions of Beatrice's eyes; his premonitory announcements that he cannot possibly express what he is about to say. These matters are closely related to a virtuosity of style and a reveling in his own power of statement, which stead-

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx, 37; xxxi, 31-39.

## Dante

ily increases during the progress of the poem and becomes a blight in the 'Paradiso.'<sup>1</sup> Such defects represent bad literary habits and show the wrong side of the tapestry. If you reply that they have a value as part of the appeal which the poem makes as a *journal intime*, I agree; but there is too much of them.

Dante's attempts at humor are lamentable. The demons who fight in the air above the pitchy sea — and who are introduced as a sort of black *scherzo* — raise no smile in us, but remind us of Dante the traveler who left the ice on the face of a culprit after he had promised to remove it as the price of an interview, and who describes with gusto the sewn-up eyelids of the gentry in Purgatory. Dante's cruelty ruins his humor. There are a few kindly greetings during the journey, but I can remember only one jovial note in the 'Comedy.' It is where the poet seems almost to slap Judge Nin on the shoulder as he cries, 'Ah, Judge Nin, how glad I am not to find you among the cast-aways!' <sup>2</sup>

Fifteen thousand lines with but one ray of manly humor, by an exile who never mentions his wife or his children, and who complains that the worst of his exile has been an enforced association with his fellow exiles — till he made himself into a party of one and so got clear of them — fifteen thousand such lines is a severe dose for humanity. The length of an epic poem is supported by the variety of its objective interests

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, xiv, 130-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Purgatorio*, v, 53.



## *Defects in the Divine Comedy*

and dramatic episodes. But the merits of the 'Divine Comedy' are purely lyrical: — there is not a dramatic scene in the work. Even the meeting with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise is a staged lyric. A hundred cantos by the same voice!

And yet the poem has found enough readers to keep it alive in each century since Dante's death in 1321. It was first printed in 1472, only about twenty years after the first Bible; which shows the rank it had already attained. This early popularity of the work was, however, destined to wane. The general revival of accurate learning which soon followed, and after that, the Renaissance in the Sixteenth Century, and the Age of Reason in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth, put for a time an end to all interest in Dante's world; and the learned tell us that no one need read any book about him that was written between 1400 and 1800. The first critical edition of the 'Divine Comedy' was Witte's in 1862.

To-day we live in a sort of *furore* about Dante, in a kind of Dante-whirl so strangely at variance with the apparent preoccupations and temper of our own age that it must bear some organic relation to them or it could not exist. The researches of the archivists have put mountainous historic materials at the disposal of literary men, who supply an avid public with books about the poet. The amateur finds a popular Dante-library on every corner, walks in, and helps himself.

It may be that in Dante people to-day find the

## *Dante*

human heat that has evaporated — temporarily as we hope — from religion, philosophy, and the fine arts during the recent scientific era. For the Age of Reason in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries was followed by an Age of Science in the Nineteenth and Twentieth, when the whole world became all agog to find out everything. As the enthusiasm for Science increased, the spirit of research chilled the genial currents of the soul, and Dante became a refuge. He was an indestructible reservoir of Mediterranean heat.

It may also be that we are drawn toward Dante because the study of him opens up the heart of all the cultivation of Western Europe during the three great periods of its existence, namely the Classic, the Mediæval, and the Modern. A knowledge of Dante leads us into a study of the Classics. Dante is in himself the Middle Ages — or by far the largest and most living fragment of them; and we ourselves are the Moderns, and of course we bring ourselves to the classroom. Thus it is that the study of Dante brings all three epochs to a single focus.

Every age summarizes the Past in terms of its own dominant philosophic notions. We have seen how thoroughly Dante did this in dealing with preceding ages. It was inevitable that the Nineteenth Century should subject Dante, as it subjected everything, to its own peculiar critical instruments. They were scientific dogmas, even as Dante's own dogmas had

## *Defects in the Divine Comedy*

been theological dogmas. One of these scientific dogmas, which closely resembles some of Dante's dogmas, is that you can find out anything whatever through hard intellectual work. The thinker presupposes his own competency as an investigator. This dogma had proved so successful in our analysis of the material universe that it was naturally extended to problems of psychology, morality, religion, and art.

The archæological, quasi-scientific, and documentary study of the fine arts during the last fifty years in Europe has pretty nearly come to the dust at the bottom of the basket: it has found out everything except the wind in the bellows. And yet there has been less normal artistic life during this period than there was during the period when men were dancing minuets. The explanation would seem to be that the truth about religion and the fine arts can only be expressed in terms of religion and the fine arts. These subjects have, of late, been studied by men who had no practical acquaintance with the vehicles which they dealt with. This is an interesting outcome of the search for truth; and there is only one thing that can be safely predicted in regard to it, namely, that it will not continue forever. The impulse beneath this movement was, as every one knows, first seen in the Revival of Learning; but the special epoch which I have in mind had a rather definite beginning, and will probably come to a rather definite close. The spirit of this epoch was ridiculed in Goethe's 'Faust' in the

## *Dante*

character of Wagner, 'Schon weiss ich viel, doch möcht ich alles wissen,' says the complacent aspirant for wisdom.

The pedant is as old as history, but no age has ever taken him so seriously as we do. Ever since Winckelmann began the examination of Greek statuary with the notion of translating Hellenic art into the German language, learned critics who have never had a chisel in their hands have been writing up art, each in the cant psychology of his own decade, and all believing that they had laid hands on the subject. Men who had no religion, no sympathy with dogma, and no experience with the government of men, have been writing tomes about the Middle Ages. Egyptologists and anthropologists are to-day endeavoring to get an insight into the most subtle mysteries of the antique or prehistoric consciousness, mysteries which, if they should really be understood, could only be recorded in the vehicles of the imagination, as, for instance, by poetry, by ritual or gesture, yet which the learned dash down in the lingo of their classroom, to be read by the spectacled world and regarded as very profound. The talk is all of Music and the Muses; but where are the Instruments? If some one of these investigators should really hear a strain that once issued from Saint Cecilia's pipes or a tune sung by Orpheus, what organ would he play it on? He would reproduce it with perfect self-assurance on his typewriter. The arrogance with which we sit down to sum up the Past,



## *Defects in the Divine Comedy*

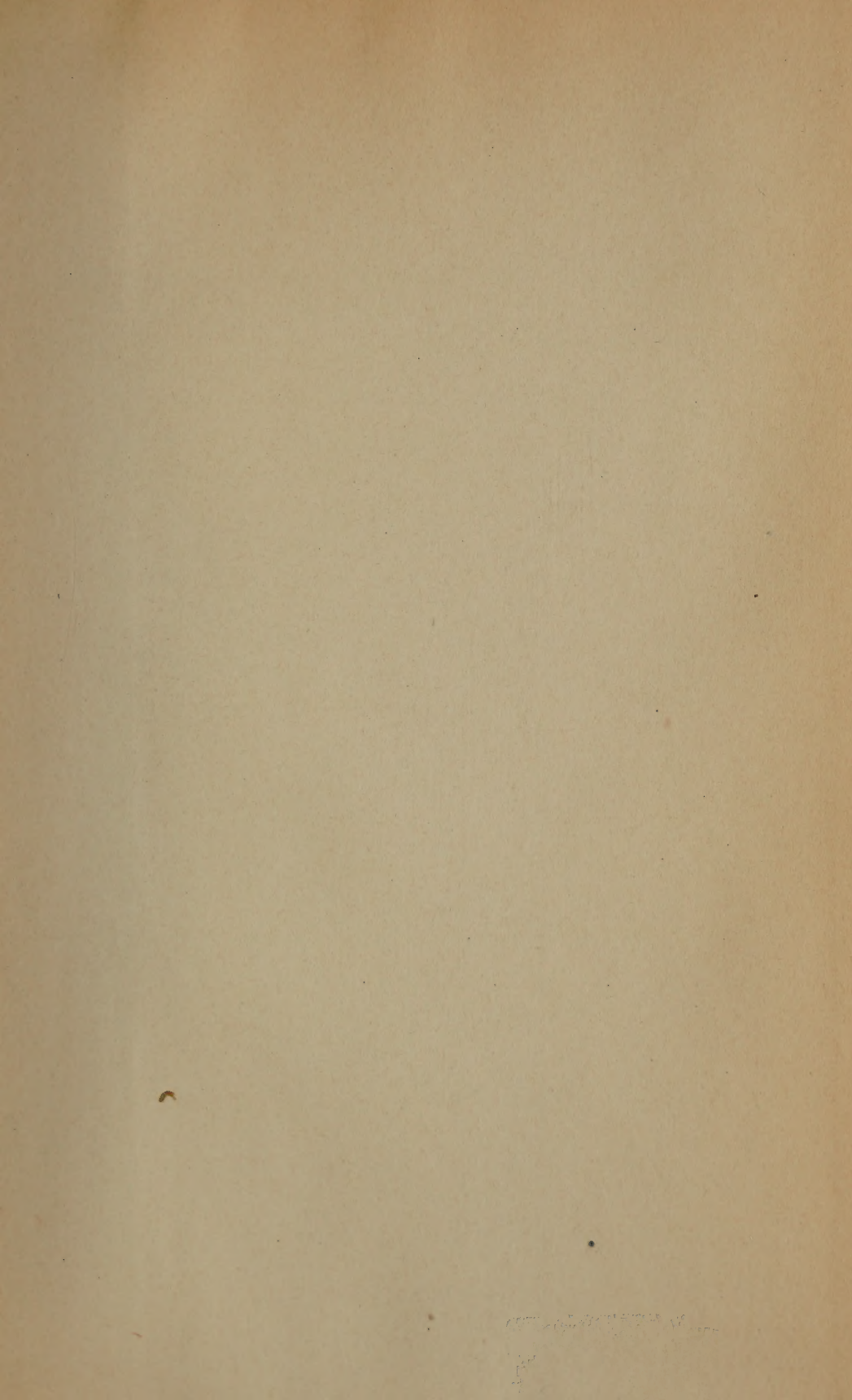
and advise our young Ph.D.'s — who have never written a couplet — to write essays about the influence of Shenstone on Wordsworth, is perhaps a sign that the epoch is drawing to a close. The absurdity of it is revealed in its dissolution.

I say that the great illusion of the period which is now passing has been that anything whatever, no matter how recondite, could be discovered through hard intellectual work and mental concentration. Would it not then be natural if, when once honestly baffled in our search for truth through concentration, we should be unexpectedly invaded by truth in the relaxation that followed on our acknowledgment of failure? Surely the world will give a great sigh of relief when it discovers that a tremendous intellectual power has been misapplied. We have been endeavoring to express the fluid universe of man's emotions in terms and symbols drawn from the study of physical science; and in the meantime we have all but forgotten the languages of Art, Poetry, and Religion which alone can express the passion for truth with which we burn.

THE END









BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 08817 292 7



